NATION

Man gives poison at Muharram event

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As GST turns 10, focus shifts to AI-led compliance

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Messi is 1st to score in 7 straight WC games

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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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An Israeli strikes destroys a building in southern Lebanon —PTI

Iran, US' 'tit-for-tat' strikes test truce

Don says Iran will 'not exist', Tehran to halt talks

DUBAI, 28 JUNE

Iran launched drone and missile strikes on Bahrain and Kuwait on Sunday in retaliation for fresh US airstrikes, while warning that negotiations to end the conflict could come to a "complete halt" if Washington continued its military action.

The latest escalation follows renewed tensions over the Strait of Hormuz after a US-led multinational maritime body expanded a shipping route near Oman without Iran's direct oversight. Tehran insists it alone should regulate the strategic waterway and warned that any alternative arrangements would delay its reopening and heighten regional tensions.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking in Baghdad, said attempts to bypass Iran's role in managing the strait would only worsen the situation. The US and Iran remain in talks on an interim peace deal covering shipping arrangements, sanctions relief and Iran's enriched uranium stockpile, but the latest fighting threatens to derail the negotiations.

US President Donald Trump said American forces had struck Iranian missile and drone storage sites, coastal radar installations and other military infrastructure after accusing Tehran of repeatedly violating the ceasefire. He warned that if attacks continued, "the Islamic Republic of Iran will no longer exist."

Kuwait said it intercepted two Iranian ballistic missiles and several drones targeting the country, which hosts a major US Army base. No casualties or damage were reported.

In Bahrain, home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, an Iranian strike damaged a residential building near the international airport, though no deaths were reported. Bahrain condemned what it called a "systematic pattern of repeated aggression". Iran's Revolutionary Guard claimed responsibility for both attacks.

The US said Sunday's strikes targeted Iranian surveillance systems, communications, air defence sites, drone storage facilities and mine-laying capabilities following an attack on the Panamanian-flagged oil tanker Kiku, carrying crude for Qatar's state energy company.

The conflict also continued in Lebanon despite parallel ceasefire efforts. Hezbollah fighters killed an Israeli soldier in southern Lebanon overnight, according to the Israeli military. Iran reiterated that any ceasefire must include an end to Israeli operations in Lebanon and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territory. —PTI

14 dead after Aramco helicopter crashes in Saudi

All 14 people on board were killed in Saudi Arabia when a helicopter belonging to the world's largest oil company Aramco crashed on Sunday morning, according to the Saudi Ministry of Energy. The accident occurred around 6 am in Ras Tanura, and everyone killed was a Saudi national, the statement said. An investigation was opened into the cause of the crash. —PTI

B'luru to soon get toll-free Mekhri-Hebbal tunnel road

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday sought to allay concerns over the proposed Mekhri Circle-Hebbal tunnel road, saying the 2.5-km twin tunnel would be toll-free and aimed at easing traffic congestion in Bengaluru.

Laying the foundation stone, he said the Bengaluru Development Authority (BDA) would execute the project using its own funds. The cut-and-cover tunnel is expected to reduce travel time across the busy Hebbal junction, which the Chief Minister described as the city's gateway. He also said the government had proposed a 17km tunnel from Hebbal to Silk Board Junction.

Shivakumar said the project formed part of a Rs 1.5 lakh crore infrastructure plan for Bengaluru, adding that the city, with 1.4 crore people and 1.35 crore vehicles, required major investments to meet future demand.

However, the project has drawn sharp criticism from urban mobility experts and the Opposition. BJP MP Tejasvi Surya argued that the tunnel would merely shift congestion by funnelling six lanes of traffic into the already saturated Mekhri Circle.

Experts have also questioned the traffic projections underpinning the project, with previous assessments by the Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority flagging flaws in the forecasting. Civic groups contend that the tunnel is unnecessary given the upcoming Blue and Pink Metro lines and suburban rail network, which are expected to ease congestion in the Hebbal corridor.

Mobility experts have further argued that the funds would be better spent on expanding BMTC bus services and improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. —PTI

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Mekhri Circle-Hebbal twin tunnel road project on Sunday —SALAR

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

COST: ₹1,139.67 CRORE

- Length: 2.5 km
- Type: Six-lane, bi-directional twin tunnel (3 lanes each)
- Construction period: 18 months
- No toll for motorists

Why the tunnel?

- Aims to ease traffic at Hebbal flyover
- Creates a signal-free corridor
- Cuts travel time from up to 30 minutes to around 2 minutes during peak hours

Tunnel alignment

- Starts near Hebbal Junction (Esteem Mall)
- Passes beneath the Hebbal flyover down ramp
- Runs along Hebbal Lake
- Crosses below the railway line
- Passes through the KVAFSU campus
- Emerges on Ballari Road near the UAS staff quarters
- Connects to an elevated corridor towards Mekhri Circle

CM WARNS OF BAN ON PAN MASALA, GUTKA WITH NARCOTICS

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Sunday said the government would crack down on manufacturers found mixing intoxicating substances into pan masala and gutka.

He warned that such products could be banned in the state if they were found to contain narcotic substances.

Addressing the 31st Foundation Day celebrations of the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences and the Nasha Mukta Bharat Conclave in Bengaluru, Shivakumar called upon students and healthcare professionals to become ambassadors of a drug-free Karnataka and join hands in combating substance abuse.

Calling the drug menace one of the biggest challenges facing society, the CM said it was a matter of concern that an increasing number of young people were falling into the trap of addiction.

"Our goal is to build a drug-free Karnataka," he said.

He said the government had launched several initiatives to curb drug abuse and would strictly enforce anti-drug measures across the state, particularly in educational institutions.

Invoking former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's words, "The children of today will make the India of tomorrow," Shivakumar said safeguarding the younger generation from drugs was crucial to securing the nation's future.

He assured the gathering of the state government's full support in building a drug-free Karnataka. —PTI

Look inwards: India tears into Pak over Karachi blast blame

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

India on Sunday forcefully dismissed Pakistan's allegations of an Indian link to an attack on a military base in Karachi.

Reports from Islamabad said Pakistani security forces killed six terrorists, after foiling a brazen attack by heavily armed militants of the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) on a Sindh Rangers compound in Karachi's densely populated Gulistan-e-Jauhar area, on Saturday night. One militant, believed to be an Afghan national, was captured alive.

The militants belonged to Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a splinter group of the TTP, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media wing, said. They rammed a vehicle into the gate, stormed in and lobbed hand grenades.

The attack left four paramilitary personnel dead and marked the city's first major terrorist strike since October 2024.

"We categorically reject them. Instead of pointing fingers at others, Pakistan would do better to look inwards, take credible action against the terror infrastructure on its territory and rid itself of its proclivity to rely on terrorism as an instrument of state policy," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the attack and alleged without proof an Indian link to the strike. —PTI

Reports claim that Pakistani security forces killed six terrorists —x

Hasina says will go to Bangladesh this year

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina said that she will return to Bangladesh this year despite the death sentence against her, asserting that her struggle is aimed at restoring democracy and protecting the democratic rights of the people rather than gaining power.

In an interview to NDTV, Hasina described the verdict against her as politically driven and maintained that she was not afraid of death.

She said she had survived several conspiracies in the past and remained confident that she would once again return to her country.

Hasina expressed confidence that the Awami League would regain ground despite the ban on the party.

She said the party's future depended on public support rather than the government's actions. The Awami League has survived repression during its 77-year history and continues to enjoy grassroots support across Bangladesh, she said.

Hasina alleged that attacks on Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, tribal communities and other minority groups had increased after her removal from power. —Agencies

FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

Citizens take pledge at a Nasha Mukt Bharat (drug-free India) campaign by the Central government in organisation with RGUHS at Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on Sunday —MOHAMMED ASAD

India, Seychelles sign 19 pacts for defence, UPI, space

VICTORIA, 28 JUNE

India and Seychelles on Sunday unveiled 19 outcomes following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Patrick Herminie, expanding cooperation in defence, maritime security, digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture and education. Key agreements include an extradition treaty, cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, rollout of UPI-based digital payments, an umbrella Line of Credit through Exim Bank, and preliminary work for a new Seychelles National Hospital. —PTI

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BJP'S UCC BILL SET FOR TWIN TMC CHALLENGE IN BENGAL ASSEMBLY

KOLKATA, 29 JUNE

The Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) government's proposed Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill is set to trigger an unusual political contest in the West Bengal assembly on Monday – not just between the treasury benches and the opposition, but also between the two rival Trinamool Congress (TMC) factions.

While both factions have signalled opposition to the Bill, insiders in both camps told PTI they are preparing separate floor strategies, deploying different speakers and political narratives.

At a strategy meeting with legislators and senior leaders on Friday, Mamata Banerjee directed her camp to mount a strong challenge to the legislation both inside and outside the Assembly, arguing that the issue raises questions relating to constitutional principles, social consensus and India's plural character.

Leaders from her camp have accused the BJP of using the UCC as an instrument of political polarisation rather than legal reform.

The Ritabrata Banerjee camp, meanwhile, has been preparing independently.

The leader of opposition has already questioned the government's urgency in bringing the legislation. —PTI

'OUT PRADHAN' CAMPAIGN

Wangchuk joins 'Cockroaches' for hunger strike at Jantar Mantar

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk on Sunday began a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, joining the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) protest demanding accountability over alleged examination irregularities and seeking the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Hundreds, including students and farmers, gathered at Jantar Mantar. Wangchuk said he could not remain silent when young people raised concerns over the system.

"I have been forced to sit here, I am not doing this happily... Many people ask me, you were doing a movement in Ladakh, why are you with CJP now. Education, which is the issue here, has been close to my heart for the last 40 years, since I was a student," he said.

Activist Sonam Wangchuk with CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke at Jantar Mantar on Sunday —PTI

Referring to his work in Ladakh, Wangchuk said protecting the Himalayas was everyone's responsibility as billions of people depend on water originating in the region.

Wangchuk said that in the absence of accountability, peaceful protest was the only option available in a democracy. The CJP protest began at Jantar Mantar on 20 June amid allegations of irregularities in the examination system, including NEET. The movement has been demanding accountability and action from the government. —PTI

46,000 removed from Mizoram electoral rolls after SIR

AIZAWL, 28 JUNE

More than 46,000 voters have been removed from Mizoram's electoral rolls following the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), Mizoram Joint Chief Electoral Officer Ethel Rothangpuii said. The exercise, which began on 20 May, concluded on Sunday.

A total of 46,191 names were deleted from the electoral rolls for reasons including death, untraceable status, permanent migration and duplicate enrolments. 312 eligible voters either refused to enrol or re-enrol due to religious beliefs. Mizoram's electorate now stands at 8,28,877, 94.72 per cent of the 8.75 lakh voters in 2025. —PTI

SIR will bring dictatorship: Siddaramaih says be alert

Says Centre is conducting exercise as popularity is declining

MYSURU, 28 JUNE

In a blistering attack, former chief minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday said that the BJP was using the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls to bring about authoritarianism.

Speaking during an SIR awareness campaign in Mysuru, he said: "They (BJP) came to power through the back door. Do you know why? Because they have no faith in democracy and the Constitution that Babasaheb Ambedkar gave us. If there are any opponents of democracy or opponents of the Constitution, they are the members of the BJP."

He alleged that the BJP's politics were rooted in authoritarianism rather than democratic and constitutional values, and saying that the polity was now shifting to "vote betrayal".

"BJP wants authoritarian rule in this country. That is precisely why they advocate 'One Nation, One Election'," he said, adding that the BJP "loves dictatorship".

Door-to-door enumeration is set to begin in the State on 30 June and conclude on 31 July. Siddaramaiah stressed that every individual must take the process seriously, warning that Congress voters were being targeted.

MLA HC Mahadevappa, former CM Siddaramaiah and KPCC President BK Hariprasad at an SIR workshop organised by the Congress, in Mysuru, on Sunday — *X@SIDDARAMAIAH*

"Out of the country's 141 crore population, there are 96 crore voters," Siddaramaiah noted. "Among us, many people have won by margins of 1,000 to 5,000 votes. In such places, if 4-5 thousand votes are snatched away, our victory becomes difficult. They delete the votes of the poor, farmers, labourers, and minorities who vote for the Congress party."

Siddaramaiah noted the case of AR Krishnamurthy, currently the MLA of Kollegal. He had lost the Santhemarahalli bypoll in 2004 by a single vote.

He also alleged that the SIR process was akin to vote theft.

Further, he alleged that the BJP's popularity was in decline, noting that the BJP received only 34 per cent of the votes during the last parliamentary elections.

"Don't forget that there is no constitutional Election Commission in the country now," he added, noting that in 2019, the BJP won 303 seats; now in 2024, they have dropped to 240. "They are out to change this result through SIR in the coming days."

Training his guns at the Hindutva politics, he asked, "Who has oppressed Hindus today? Who created the caste divisions and the varna system? Who denied education to the Shudras for hundreds of years? You must understand this. That is why Babasaheb Ambedkar said that those who do not know history can never create history."

He appealed to downtrodden communities not to support the BJP, saying that if the Shudra community falls "prey" to the BJP's inducements, saying that "if everyone gets equal opportunities, how will they be able to continue exploiting people". —*Salar News*

> **The BJP party has received only 36 per cent of the votes during the last parliamentary election. 64 per cent of the people have voted for other parties. It's hard to imagine what would happen if 10 per cent of these 64 per cent votes are let go**
>
> —Siddaramaiah, former chief minister
>
> **Congress is not against SIR. The Election Commission can remove deceased voters, but not eligible voters under the guise of lack of documents, or caste and religion.**
>
> —BK Hariprasad, KPCC President

Farmers' land being registered as Waqf property: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka on Sunday raked up the Waqf land issue alleging that the "appeasement politics" is threatening the livelihood of farmers.

In a post on X, he alleged that the Karnataka government had allowed Waqf references to be entered in land records. Ashoka alleged that Waqf references had already been entered in the Record of Rights, Tenancy, and Crops (RTCs, also known as Pahani) of more than 1.8 lakh farmers and that the process was being extended to cover 3 lakh RTCs across 31 districts.

He said the figures included 73,000 RTCs in Uttara Kannada, 48,000 in Dakshina Kannada, 38,000 in Shivamogga, 18,000 in Bengaluru South, and 17,000 each in Kalaburagi and Bagalkot.

Padmanabhanagar MLA R Ashoka during an SIR workshop organised by the BJP, in Bengaluru, on Sunday —*X @RASHOKABJP*

He demanded that the government immediately halt the process, review all disputed entries in farmers' RTCs and release a White Paper before the people.

"The farmer's land and their rights must be protected. We will never allow farmers' land to be swallowed in the name of Waqf under any circumstances!" Ashoka said.

Targeting Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, he stated: "Are you going to make farmers beggars on their own land?" and asked, "Is the interest of the farmer important to the Congress government, or is the politics of appeasement important?" —*PTI*

VP CALLS FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION TO BUILD DRUG-FREE INDIA

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Vice President CP Radhakrishnan urged a fight against substance abuse, noting the importance of collaboration among educational institutions, families, healthcare workers, and law enforcement for a drug-free India.

Addressing the 31st Foundation Day of Rajiv Gandhi University he stated that substance abuse threatens health, education, productivity, family, and national development.

He highlighted the role of young people in leading the movement, saying, "The vision of Nasha Mukta Bharat is not merely the absence of drugs. It is the presence of healthy choices, informed decisions, supportive families, and resilient communities."

Radhakrishnan praised the university's role in health education and expressed confidence that students would lead efforts through treatment, awareness, and policy advocacy.

He urged students to spread the anti-drug pledge, emphasising awareness starting with individuals and across communities.

He called for research-driven approaches involving technology, counselling, peer support, and public health outreach. —*PTI*

Mulbagal: 3 of family killed in vehicle collision

KOLAR, 28 JUNE

Three members of a family were killed after their two-wheeler rammed into the trailer of a tractor on the Bengaluru-Chennai National Highway near V Gittahalli village in Mulbagal taluk on Saturday evening. The victims Abubaker, 38; his wife Sabeera, 37; and their 16-year-old daughter Joya, all residents of N Chamakalahalli village. According to Mulbagal Rural Police PSI Arun Patil, the family was returning home from Hoskote when the accident occurred around 6 pm. Police said the tractor, carrying fertiliser to a roadside farm, suddenly entered the highway, leading to the collision. All three died on the spot. Mulbagal Rural Police have arrested the tractor driver, Giribabu of Nangali village, and registered a case. Further investigation is underway. —*SALAR NEWS*

State enters Guinness for 15L saplings planted

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar stated on Sunday that State government received a Guinness World Record for planting a saplings across multiple locations. This comes a day after the Bengaluru Development Authority with NGOs and over 50,000 citizens planted 15 lakh saplings across the City in 12 hours. "My heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made this achievement possible," Shivakumar stated, posting the picture of him receiving the certificate with MLA and BDA head NA Haris. "May our shared vision keep Bengaluru green, vibrant, and sustainable for generations to come." —*SALAR NEWS*

If short flyovers don't work, how will short tunnels: Surya

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya on Sunday termed the proposed tunnel road from Mehkri Circle to Hebbal Junction in Bengaluru "unscientific".

He cited a recent video of Bengaluru Development Minister Krishna Byre Gowda saying that "short flyovers" don't work, citing the example of the infamous Silk Board Junction where the traffic jams when the flyover ends – referred to as a bottleneck.

"If short flyovers don't work, how will a short tunnel," Surya posted on X. "Chief Minister (DK Shivakumar), you have not laid a foundation stone today. You have laid the tombstone of scientific urban planning in Bengaluru".

The Bengaluru South MP pointed out that the government's own Detailed Project Report (DPR) admits the 2km three-lane twin tunnel, being built at the cost Rs 1,139-crore of will be saturated from the very first day of operation.

"Not five years later. Not ten years later. Day One. If the project's own report says it will begin its life in a traffic jam, then who exactly is this project for?" he said. "This project seems designed to make life easier for a privileged few, the VIPs of Sadashivanagar, including the CM and the City's elite who use this corridor to reach the airport, while ordinary taxpayers across Bengaluru foot the bill."

"Flyovers have failed. Tunnels will fail too," he added. —*Salar with Agencies*

> **If the government genuinely wanted to reduce congestion, it would have fast-tracked the Red Line Metro. Public transport is the only proven long-term solution for Bengaluru**
>
> —Tejasvi Surya, BJP MP

BJP MP Tejasvi Surya recently met Bengaluru Minister Krishna Byre Gowda —*X @TEJASVI_SURYA*

BOOK LAUNCH

Congress Rajya Sabha member Mansoor Ali Khan attended the book launch of 'Ashraf al Thizkoor', which highlights the life and contribution of Hazrat Allama Mufti Muhammad Ashraf Ali Sahib (Rahimahullah), one of the most respected Islamic scholars and educators. The event was organised by Darul Uloom Sabeelur Rashad in Bengaluru on Sunday with guests including Moulana Ahmed Simal Sab, Moulana Rahi Fidai, Minister KJ George, Mufti Maqsood Imran, MLC Saleem Ahmed, R Roshan Baig, Ubedulla Shariff, and Mehroz Khan —*SALAR*

ENSURE 100% PULSE POLIO VACCINATION, SAYS DKS

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar appealed to parents to ensure that every child below five gets the pulse polio vaccine.

He said the state government was committed to safeguarding children from disability and sustaining India's polio-free status.

Speaking to reporters in Bengaluru on Sunday after launching the pulse polio vaccination drive from his residence, Shivakumar described it as a "historic programme."

"Today, our government is administering this vaccine to every child below five so that no child suffers from disability in future," he said.

He also congratulated NGOs, Health Department officials, Medical Education Department officials and others for extending their cooperation to the campaign.

Shivakumar said India had achieved polio-free status but stressed that vigilance was necessary.

"This country has become polio-free. However, keeping in mind that the disease could enter from neighbouring countries, we are remaining vigilant," he said.

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar with Health Minister UT Khader during a pulse polio drive in Bengaluru, on Sunday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

The chief minister also praised state Health Minister UT Khader for spearheading the programme from his residence.

Appealing for wider public participation, Shivakumar urged parents, elders and voluntary organisations to ensure that children in villages and remote areas also received the vaccine. — *PTI*

After defamation suit, HM vows legal fight against RSS

BENGALURU, 28 JUNE

Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge on Sunday said he would fight the criminal defamation case filed against him over remarks on the RSS through legal means, asserting that "the Constitution and the law are on our side."

His comments came after a Bengaluru court summoned him and former Youth Congress president Mohammed Haris Nalapad to appear on July 21. Priyank reiterated his demand that the RSS register itself as an organisation, questioning its funding and accountability.

Karnataka Congress President BK Hariprasad backed him, saying the RSS should first register itself if it welcomed the proceedings.

He alleged the RSS had historically targeted those who upheld the Constitution and secular values, including Mahatma Gandhi. —*PTI*

4 HELD FOR THROWING SLIPPER AT CONG MLA

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 28 JUNE

Chikkaballapur police on Sunday have arrested four people for allegedly throwing slippers in the direction of Chikkaballapur Congress MLA Pradeep Eshwar a day earlier.

The incident broke out during the Kempegowda Jayanthi programme. JD(S) workers had gathered at the venue to protest "irresponsible and insane" remarks that Eshwar made against Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy and his family. Eshwar had alleged that Kumaraswamy had 60 wrist watches worth crores, and questioned how his wife Anitha had purchased 32 acres of land near Bidadi.

The situation turned ugly

when a Eshwar was standing up from the roof of his car, challenging the crowd and twisting his moustache. The angered workers then threw slippers at his direction.

Police used CCTV footage of the crowd and arrested four of the accused, Akhil Reddy, Prakash, Mohan Raj and , with investigations still ongoing.

The incident has sent ripples in political circles. Eshwar claims that he was targeted because he was from the OBC community, and alleged that Kumaraswamy was trying to intimate him, challenging the JD(S) leader to face him at Chikkaballapura.

Chief Minister DK Shivakumar condemned the "lowly" incident on X, stating "When we lose publicly, civilization dies too!"

Without naming anyone, he added: You, who have dragged the ideals of democracy to the streets and put them up for auction, is the culture you're teaching your workers? Remember, such violent attacks only strengthen the path of struggle of our leaders." —*Salar News*

ISSUES YELLOW ALERT

IMD warns fishers of heavy rain near coasts

BELAGAVI, 28 JUNE

The India Meteorological Department has issued a 'Yellow Alert' for State's coastal districts, forecasting heavy rain accompanied by strong winds over Dakshina Kannada and Udupi, while Uttara Kannada is likely to receive moderate rainfall with gusty winds. The weather department has also predicted widespread rainfall across several parts of Karnataka over the next few days.

In view of the rough sea conditions and heavy rainfall, coastal residents have been advised to remain vigilant. Fishermen have been specifically urged not to venture into the sea until conditions improve. The department has

forecast light to moderate thundershowers in parts of north Karnataka, including Bagalkote, Belagavi, Bidar, Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayapura and Yadgir districts.

In the Malnad and southern interior regions, moderate rainfall is expected at many places in Shivamogga, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Mysuru, Mandya, Kodagu and Chamarajanagar.

Light rainfall has also been forecast for several locations in Bengaluru Urban and Rural districts, as well as Ballari, Chikkaballapur, Chitradurga, Davanagere, Kolar, Ramanagara, Tumakuru and Vijayanagara. —*Salar News*

— PTI

'Missing' posters surface in Delhi targeting Rahul

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Posters describing Rahul Gandhi as "missing" appeared across Delhi amid BJP criticism of his foreign visits. BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla responded with a post on X, calling him "Gumshuda Lapata MIA Rahul Baba" and "Leader of Paryatan." He contrasted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's work record with Gandhi's alleged frequent holidays, claiming Modi has been in "work mode" for almost 9,000 days, while Gandhi spends crores on holidays. Poonawalla alleged Gandhi often remains absent during crucial times and questioned the funding of his foreign trips, asserting Gandhi would be "missing" when the country needs him. —*PTI*

All Punjab Sikh MLAs to appear before Akal Takht

CHANDIGARH, 28 JUNE

All Sikh MLAs and cabinet ministers will appear before the Akal Takht, which summoned them on 29 June regarding the anti-sacrilege law, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann said on Sunday. His statement came after a closed-door meeting with party MLAs in Amritsar to decide the action in view of the Akal Takht's directions. Our MLAs and ministers will go there and present their sides in writing, Mann said told reporters in Amritsar. Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldip Singh Gargajj, on 15 June, had summoned all Sikh MLAs, regardless of party affiliation, and Sikh ministers before the Akal Takht on 29 June regarding the anti-sacrilege law. The Akal Takht and the SGPC had objected to the anti-sacrilege law, Jaagat Jot Sri Guru Granth Sahib Satkar (Amendment) Act, 2026, saying it was enacted without consulting the Sikh Panth. —*PTI*

Ex-BJP leader hints at new party in Himachal

SHIMLA, 28 JUNE

Attempts are going on to create a political alternative in Himachal Pradesh that can take on the deep-rooted two-party system in the state.

Ram Lal Markanda, a former BJP minister who was expelled from the party in 2024, said he has been meeting leaders from various parties, including those who feel sidelined in the Congress and the BJP, and that a new party may be launched in March-April 2027.

"We were waiting for the panchayat poll results and now talks with senior leaders would resume," he said on Sunday.

"Senior leaders of both the BJP and the Congress who come to power alternately are feeling sidelined, making it necessary for a new party that ensures regard for senior leaders," claimed Markanda, a former MLA who represented Lahaul and Spiti.

Markanda was expelled from the BJP after he contested the 2024 assembly by-election from Lahaul and Spiti as an Independent.

"The party should be launched early so that leaders get time for spadework in their assembly constituencies," said a senior Congress leader who was involved in the discussions. — *PTI*

Cops raid houses of 8 held in Ram Temple scam case

Lawyers to not represent accused; Cong questions PM's silence

AYODHYA, 28 JUNE

Ayodhya police on Sunday conducted raids at the residences of all the eight people arrested in connection with the alleged embezzlement of Ram Temple donations, sources said.

Police teams, accompanied by local magistrates, searched the homes of suspects Lav Kush Mishra, Avinash Shukla and Ramashankar Yadav.

The raids came two days after all the eight were remanded to judicial custody till 29 June.

During Sunday's searches, the police found Aadhaar cards, PAN cards and bank documents from the residence of Manish Yadav, the sources said.

Searches were also carried out at the residences of the other accused, including Ramashankar alias Tinnu Yadav. The police also spoke to neighbours of some of the accused to gather information about their assets.

The eight accused, Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Lav Kush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey, Ram Shankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava and Ramashankar alias Tinnu Yadav, were associated with counting cash at the Ram Temple.

Police officials conduct a search operation at the residence of an accused in the embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya on Sunday —*PTI*

Investigators have so far recovered Rs 79.85 lakh. The case has been registered under BNS provisions.

The accused in the Ayodhya Ram temple donations case are unlikely to find lawyers in Ayodhya, local lawyers said.

The final decision about the refusal to take up their case will be taken at the general body meeting of the Faizabad Bar Association, expected on Monday, Kalika Mishra, the association president, said on Sunday.

A similar decision was taken by the lawyers from Ayodhya back in 2005 when those involved in a terrorist attack on the Ram Temple were produced in a Faizabad court.

Meanwhile, the Congress questioned Prime Minister Modi's silence on the embezzlement of Ram Temple's donations and demanded the arrest of those behind the "scam". Addressing a press conference on Saturday, Congress spokesperson Akhilesh Singh said the investigation should be conducted under the supervision of a sitting SC judge as the corruption is "deep-rooted". — *PTI*

IN TALKS WITH K'TAKA, KERALAM

Southern states, including Karnataka, have opposed the Bill, saying it replaces the fully Centre-funded MGNREGA with a 60:40 Centre-state funding model, increasing the financial burden on states —*PTI*

T'gana likely to move SC against G RAM G Act

HYDERABAD, 28 JUNE

The Telangana government is considering moving Supreme Court against the proposed Viksit Bharat Guarantee Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin (VB G RAM G) Act, which replaces the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy, who heads a Cabinet sub-committee on the issue, said Congress would not accept the proposed law.

Following a video conference of the sub-committee on Saturday, the panel decided to consult the Karnataka and Kerala Chief Ministers to explore a common legal strategy or coordinated measures to safeguard the powers and financial interests of states.

The committee also felt that the wider political and administrative implications of the proposed legislation had not been adequately communicated to the public. It will place its recommendations before the state Cabinet on 2 July.

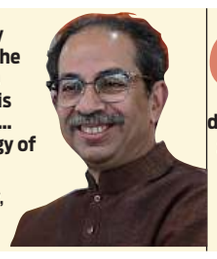
The Cabinet is expected to decide whether Telangana should adopt the central framework, enact its own employment guarantee law, move the Supreme Court, or pursue a combination of legal and administrative measures.

Civil society organisations have urged the state to enact its own employment guarantee legislation, arguing that the new framework could cost Telangana nearly Rs 2,500 crore.

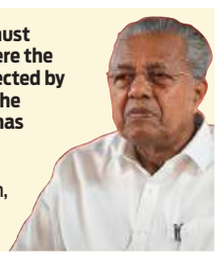
Southern states, including Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Keralam, have opposed the Bill, saying it replaces the fully Centre-funded MGNREGA with a 60:40 Centre-state funding model, increasing the financial burden on states. They have also objected to capped central allocations, a mandatory 60-day employment break during peak agricultural seasons, and the removal of Mahatma Gandhi's name from the flagship rural employment scheme. —*PTI*

Those blaming the Keralam government over the Sabarimala gold loss case should also take note of developments at the Ayodhya Ram temple

-K Muraleedharan, Keralam Devaswom Minister


My question is why have they turned the Ram temple into a shop. This temple is the outcome of a long struggle... They have betrayed the ideology of Hindutva

-Uddhav Thackeray, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief


The Trust must explain where the money collected by exploiting the devotion of the people has gone. This exposes the true nature of Sangh Parivar -Pinarayi Vijayan, ex- Keralam CM

MDMK leaders join DMK after alliance ends

CHENNAI, 28 JUNE

DMK on Sunday received a major boost as over 150 senior MDMK functionaries joined the party, a day after the MDMK ended its eight-year alliance with DMK.

The leaders, including state office-bearers, district secretaries, advocates and student representatives, joined DMK at its headquarters, Anna Arivalayam, in the presence of party president and former chief minister MK Stalin.

Among those who switched sides were high-level committee members and district secretaries Pulavar S Sevanthiyappan (Sivaganga), T R Senguttuvan (Tiruvallur), propaganda secretary Thiruparankundram Azhagusundaram and RMS Sekhar (Virudhunagar). Around 40 students from Tamil Nadu Dr Ambedkar Law University also joined the party.

The defections came a day after the MDMK general council, led by Vaiko, resolved to quit the DMK-led Secular

Progressive Alliance, alleging "behind-the-scenes political deals" after the May 4 Assembly election results had gone against the people's mandate. The party also alleged that arrangements had been made to install an AIADMK government, without directly naming the DMK.

Meanwhile, the DMK student wing announced a statewide protest on 29 June demanding the dismissal of Tamil Nadu Human Resources Management Minister D Sarathkumar over a controversial viral video in which he was allegedly seen crushing a white powder during an IPL match. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF MONSOON SESSION

Modi govt Cabinet reshuffle buzz gains momentum

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

A reshuffle of the Union Council of Ministers appears imminent, with sources indicating that Prime Minister Narendra Modi could carry out the exercise in July, ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament.

The reshuffle is expected to coincide with the announcement of BJP president Nitin Nabin's new organisational team, with younger leaders likely to be given key party responsibilities. Sources said Nabin has held consultations with several Union ministers of state, and some ministers may be moved to organisational roles while party office-bearers are inducted into the government.

Portfolio changes are also expected. The future of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is under scrutiny following controversies including the NEET paper

leak and alleged irregularities in the CBSE digital marking system.

The timing of the reshuffle will depend on the Prime Minister's overseas engagements, including visits to Seychelles, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's visit to India. BJP is also expected to follow its "one man, one post" principle. Union ministers Pankaj Chaudhary and Harsh Malhotra, recently appointed BJP chiefs for Uttar Pradesh and Delhi respectively, are likely to exit the government. George Kurian has already resigned after his Rajya Sabha term ended, while Ravneet Singh Bittu is expected to focus on the Punjab Assembly polls.

Sources said the reshuffle will factor in regional, caste and political considerations, with more representation likely from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab and West Bengal. The induction of leaders from breakaway TMC and Sena (UBT) factions will depend on the Lok Sabha Speaker's decision on pending disqualification petitions. —*PTI*

Uddhav demands disqualification of six rebel MPs

PARBHANI, 28 JUNE

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday demanded the immediate disqualification of six party MPs who defected to the Eknath Shinde-led camp, alleging their switch was part of a larger political conspiracy.

Addressing a rally in Parbhani, the constituency of rebel MP Sanjay Jadhav, Thackeray said the Lok Sabha Speaker must uphold the rule of law on the defections and alleged the BJP's central leadership was systematically sidelining its own state leaders.

He termed the defections "Operation Devendra", claiming the BJP was engineering the moves to undermine Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, just as it had done to other leaders previously.

Thackeray also attacked the BJP over the Ram Mandir donation embezzlement issue, labelling it the "Babur Janata Party".

The six rebel MPs had won their seats against BJP and Shiv Sena candidates in the 2024 general elections before joining Shinde's faction this week. The Sena (UBT) had won nine Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra that year.

Targeting Shinde, Thackeray alleged the deputy chief minister had "no future" in the BJP-led alliance and would be discarded once his utility was exhausted. —*PTI*

TMC rebels hold meet, face forgery case

KOLKATA, 28 JUNE

The Ritabrata Banerjee-led breakaway TMC faction held a second meeting with former Kolkata Municipal Corporation councillors within a week, signalling a renewed challenge to Mamata Banerjee's leadership, even as the party's loyalist camp filed police complaints against the dissidents for forgery and impersonation.

Around 47 former KMC councillors attended Saturday's meeting at a private banquet hall in Topsia, East Kolkata, aimed at strengthening the rebel faction's base ahead of likely civic body elections later this year. A similar meeting had taken place at a New Town property on 22 June.

Both meetings displayed the TMC's party symbol and the name 'All India Trinamool Congress', conspicuously without images of Mamata Banerjee. Banerjee loyalist Dola Sen filed complaints with two police stations alleging forgery of the party symbol and impersonation.

Rebel MLA Sandipan Saha asserted the faction's legitimacy, saying they held numbers and constituted the principal opposition in the state assembly. The West Bengal government had dissolved the KMC board on 8 June following Mayor Firhad Hakim's resignation. — *PTI*

KERALAM SPEAKER DENIES ROLE IN LIQOUR ROW

KOTTAYAM, 28 JUNE

Keralam Assembly Speaker Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan on Sunday denied backing amendments to the Abkari Act permitting the sale of low-alcohol liquor during the previous LDF government's tenure.

Rejecting the LDF's claim that the Subject Committee had approved the move, he said the minutes were incorrect as he had left the meeting midway and later submitted his dissent in writing to then minister KN Balagopal.

He said he had also opposed reducing a liquor company's licence fee and allowing bars in IT hubs, alleging attempts to drag him into the controversy. —*PTI*

TO FOCUS ON HEALTH, SPACE

India, Seychelles sign 19 pacts for defence, digital payments

VICTORIA, 28 JUNE

India and Seychelles on Sunday unveiled 19 outcomes following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Patrick Herminie, expanding cooperation in defence, maritime security, digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture and education.

Key agreements include an extradition treaty, cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, rollout of UPI-based digital payments, an umbrella Line of Credit through Exim Bank, and preliminary work for a new Seychelles National Hospital. India also gifted a fast patrol vessel, 10 utility vehicles, five Laser Radial class boats, six ambulances, 500 metric tonnes of rice and 8,500 metric tonnes of cement.

The refit of Coast Guard vessel PS Zoroaster and upgrade of a Dornier aircraft were also completed.

The two sides signed agreements on affordable medicines under the Jan Aushadhi scheme, diplomatic training, agricultural research, seafarer certification and marked 50 years of diplomatic ties.

PM Narendra Modi receives the highest civilian honour 'Guardian of the Blue Horizon' from Seychelles President Patrick Herminie —*PTI*

'INDIA'S VISION IS TO MAKE INDIAN OCEAN AN OCEAN OF OPPORTUNITY'

Addressing a joint press interaction, Modi said India envisioned an Indian Ocean where maritime security and economic prosperity go hand in hand, stressing that the defence and security of India and Seychelles were "integral to each other".

He said India would deepen economic cooperation, improve connectivity and share its digital public infrastructure expertise with Seychelles.

MODI CALLS FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Addressing Seychelles' National Assembly, Mr. Modi called for climate action based on fairness, responsibility and equity, saying Small Island Developing States bore the brunt of climate change despite contributing the least to it. He proposed expanding cooperation in the blue economy, fisheries, renewable energy, sustainable tourism and digital innovation, reaffirming India's commitment to advancing the interests of the Global South alongside Seychelles. —*PTI*

— PTI

Drugs worth Rs 10 cr seized in Thrissur, Ah'bad

THRISSUR, 28 JUNE

Police arrested seven persons, including two women, in two linked cases. They seized 308gm of MDMA, with part concealed in a woman's private parts, after intercepting a car at Vaniyampara. The four occupants, returning from a party in Palakkad, led to the recovery of 2gm from the woman and 13gm from Shifaz's house in Pavaratty. Further searches uncovered 288.8 grams from an aluminium shop in Thaikkad. Meanwhile, Ahmedabad police detained Ibrahim Sefulla at the airport, discovering 10,911gm of hydroponic marijuana valued over Rs 10 crore in his checked baggage. The passenger arrived from Bangkok, and the drugs were detected via sniffer dog and field tests. All suspects are in police custody, and investigations are going on. —*PTI*

Ladakh cracks down on illegal off-roading

LEH, 28 JUNE

Ladakh authorities have launched a first-of-its-kind crackdown on illegal off-roading in eco-sensitive zones, imposing Rs 2 lakh fines on four tourists for violating the Wildlife (Protection) Act. The offenders, from HP, Chandigarh, Punjab and UP, were fined Rs 50,000 each for driving into Pangong Lake and protected wildlife areas in Changthang and Nubra. The vehicles were impounded, with the LG urging visitors to practise responsible tourism. On 23 June, wildlife staff detected a Mahindra Thar driven into Pangong Lake for stunts, damaging habitat; similar incidents involving Hyundai Creta, Mahindra Thar, and Toyota Fortuner followed. The LG said that off-road driving in protected areas is punishable under the Wildlife Act. —*PTI*

Kuki-Zo demands removal of Naga road blockades

KANGPOKPI, 28 JUNE

The Kuki-Zo organisation, CoTU, has given a 48-hour ultimatum to the Manipur government to remove all blockades by Naga groups along NH-2 and NH-37. The civil society body said these blockades have caused severe disruption, affecting essential supplies, medicines, and public movement for over a month. The statement noted that the road closures have led to hardship and depleting stocks in the Kuki-Zo majority district. CoTU warned that failure to act would force them to undertake "appropriate democratic measures" to protect public interests amid the conflict between Kukis and Nagas, which has resulted in over 260 deaths and widespread displacement since February. —*PTI*

Six UP cops suspended over cattle smuggling

BALLIA, 28 JUNE

Six police personnel in Ballia have been suspended over alleged involvement in cattle smuggling, following a police inquiry. SP Omvir Singh said the suspensions, ordered on Saturday, involved constables Mukesh Kumar, Rinku Gupta, Aman Singh, and head constables Manoj Kumar, Dinesh Vishwakarma, plus constable Alok Singh. Vehicles used by suspected smugglers were intercepted recently, and questioning revealed suspicious activity and possible collusion with police. Singh confirmed that departmental proceedings have been initiated against the suspended officers after their alleged links with cattle traffickers came to light. About a month ago, 17 police personnel were attached to police lines over similar complaints, highlighting ongoing concerns over cattle smuggling.—*PTI*

Man gives poison at Muharram event

Cops seize 14,900 capsules containing zinc phosphide from Mumbai man

Police said the man had procured 50 kg zinc phosphide and had also ordered 30,000 empty capsules—*PTI*

MUMBAI, 28 JUNE

Police arrested a man in Mumbai after he was allegedly caught distributing capsules filled with zinc phosphide, a highly toxic rat poison, during a Muharram procession on Friday night.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central Zone-I) Jayant Meena said a Mumbai Police team became suspicious after spotting the man handing out capsules to participants in the procession in an area coming under Byculla Police Station.

"Last night, during the Muharram procession a police team found a man distributing capsules to people taking part in the procession. The police seized all the capsules he had," Meena said.

Police detained the accused and recovered 14,900 capsules allegedly containing zinc phosphide before they could be distributed.

A few hours later, Byculla Police received a Medico-Legal Case (MLC) report involving a man identified as Salman Syed, who allegedly suffered stomach pain and vomiting after consuming one of the capsules.

During questioning, the accused told the police that he intended to target the Muharram procession.

Police said the man had procured 50 kilograms of zinc phosphide and had also ordered 30,000 empty capsules.

Authorities are now investigating the motive behind the alleged act and whether other individuals were involved.

Zinc phosphide is a highly toxic chemical widely used as a rodenticide in agriculture and for pest control. It can be extremely dangerous if swallowed by humans or animals.

When zinc phosphide comes into contact with stomach acid, it releases phosphine gas, a toxic gas that is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream. Exposure can damage multiple organs and lead to organ failure. — *Agencies*

Advisory issued for Mansarovar pilgrims

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Saturday cautioned Indian citizens undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through trips organised by private tour operators, and also asked the pilgrims to verify if their tour operator is duly registered and authorised.

"This Ministry is in receipt of several requests for help and assistance from Indian citizens stuck in Nepal while undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra without the required entry permit and visas for China, through tours organised by private tour operators," the MEA said in an advisory.

"Citizens are advised not to commence their journey from India until all required travel documents have been obtained for undertaking the complete journey," it says.

Commencing travel without confirmed documentation or in anticipation of obtaining the necessary documentation "increases the likelihood of being stranded," it adds. — *PTI*

Ex-Telegraph editor's passport renewal bid blocked after SIR

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

The Congress, Trinamool Congress and the CPI(M) attacked the Centre after the former editor of 'The Telegraph' R Rajagopal said his passport renewal application had been blocked after the deletion of his name from West Bengal's electoral rolls during SIR.

Opposition leaders said that the plight of Rajagopal reflected the wider erosion of citizens' rights.

Rajagopal, in a note, said he found himself in a "state of civic uncertainty," spending much of his time reconstructing decades-old family records after an adverse police report linked to his omission from the electoral rolls held up his passport renewal.

"Like nearly 27 lakh other residents of West Bengal, I was excluded on account of what were described as 'logical discrepancies.' No reason was furnished even after I submitted my matriculation certificate, and my appeal is now pending before one of the tribunals constituted as per SC directions," Rajagopal wrote.

"Although I completed biometric formalities on 19 March 2026, police has not cleared my application as my name no longer appears on the electoral roll," he added.

"If someone who spent his professional life in journalism and edited a well-known newspaper can encounter such problems, one can imagine what commoners must endure," he wrote. — *PTI*

Rave parties: Himachal HC orders transfer of DC, SP

SHIMLA, 28 JUNE

The Himachal Pradesh High Court has ordered the transfer of the Kullu deputy commissioner, SP and the sub-divisional magistrate, observing that they failed to maintain public order and instead facilitated the organisation of large scale rave parties in the Parvati Valley of Kullu district.

Chief Justice Gurmeet Singh Sandhawalia and Justice Bipin Chander Negi directed the state government to transfer the officials within a week of the order, and to launch departmental proceedings against them.

The order was pronounced on 24 June and the detailed copy was released on Saturday.

The bench ordered the registration of an FIR and the constitution of a SIT headed by an officer not below the rank of DIG to probe the matter.

The case pertains to an event organised at Green Forest-I and Green Forest-II in Grahan near Kasol from 7 to 11 June for which tickets were sold.

The venue was located in an isolated forest area, with around 50 camping tents, private guards and infrastructure capable of accommodating thousands of people.

The bench observed that the DSP report dated 5 June had warned that possibility of narcotics consumption but permission was issued by the SDM on 6 June.

Police reached the venue and stopped the events, registering two FIRs, only after the intervention of the HC's vacation bench on 9 June. Huge quantities of empty liquor bottles, cigarette butts, rolling papers allegedly used for cannabis consumption and other evidence suggesting substance abuse were found. — *PTI*

HC raps student for false claims against university

MUMBAI, 28 JUNE

The Bombay HC pulled up a law student for making "reckless and irresponsible" statements while challenging a university's decision to bar her from appearing for final exams due to poor attendance, observing that justice does not mean "whatever I want and howsoever I put it."

Justices Vibha Kankanwadi and Ajit Kadethankar dismissed the 23-year-old's plea, noting that her attempts to overcome her own faults through false claims constituted an "abuse of the legal process".

The court, in its judgment dated 18 June, noted that any cause taken up before courts must be bona fide.

The petitioner, a postgraduate student of the Maharashtra National Law University in Sambhajinagar, had challenged the institution's decision to bar her from final semester examinations for failing to meet the mandatory 75 per cent attendance requirement.

After a single bench dismissed her plea in April, she filed a review petition seeking a direction to the University to conduct a special examination.

The student claimed there was an error in her attendance computation. — *PTI*

ADIEU BHAGYARAJ

Veteran filmmaker, actor and screenwriter K Bhagyaraj was laid to rest with full State honours at the Besant Nagar Electric Crematorium in Chennai on Sunday, bringing to an end a career that left a lasting imprint on Tamil cinema —*SCREENGRAB*

Justice Narasimha to join SC Collegium

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Justice PS Narasimha is set to become a member of the Supreme Court Collegium following Justice JK Maheshwari's retirement on Sunday. As the fifth seniormost judge, Justice Narasimha will serve until his retirement on 2 May 2028. Justice Maheshwari's tenure lasted nearly five years before he demitted office. The Collegium now comprises Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Vikram Nath, Justice B V Nagarathna, Justice MM Sundresh, and Justice Narasimha.

Established in 1993 through an SC judgement, the Collegium system involves five top judges recommending appointments, transfers, and elevations of judges to the SC and 25 HCs. The government can oppose recommendations although the system generally accepts the Collegium's decisions.

Born on 3 May 1963 in Hyderabad, Justice Narasimha earned degrees in economics, political science, and public administration from Nizam College, and studied law at Delhi University's Campus Law Centre in 1988. He practised in Hyderabad's HC and tribunals before shifting to the SC, appearing in Constitution bench cases and serving as commission counsel for the Justice Chinnappa Commission. — *PTI*

JEE student jumps from Kota flyover

KOTA, 28 JUNE

An 18-year-old student from Bihar died after jumping from the Kota-Jhalawar flyover late Saturday night, marking the seventh student suicide in the coaching hub this year.

The deceased, Jaishree, had been preparing for the JEE engineering entrance examination at a Kota coaching institute since January and was staying in a paying guest room in the Vigyan Nagar area. She jumped from the flyover around 11 pm and was rushed to a nearby hospital, where she succumbed to her injuries.

Circle Inspector Mukesh Meena said the case appears to be a suicide, though circumstances would become clearer after her parents arrive from Araria district in Bihar. A post-mortem will follow. – *PTI*

Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support

Cops recreate crime scene in Ketan murder case

PUNE, 28 JUNE

- The exercise aimed to establish the sequence of events of the incident on 18 June, when Ketan was allegedly killed by Siya, 20, and her lover Chetan Chaudhary, 22

Police on Sunday took Siya Goyal, an accused in the alleged murder of her fiancé and Pune realtor Ketan Agarwal, to Lohagad Fort to reconstruct the scene of the crime, using a dummy to replicate the moment he was pushed to his death, an officer confirmed. The exercise aimed to establish the exact sequence of events from the incident on 18 June, when the 25-year-old victim was allegedly killed by Goyal, 20, and her lover Chetan Chaudhary, 22.

"A crime scene recreation was conducted this morning. The accused was taken to the actual spot where the incident took place," said a senior officer from Pune rural police. The police created a dummy body, and Goyal was asked to demonstrate how she pushed Ketan from the location, also showing the route taken to reach the crime scene. Chaudhary will undergo a similar reconstruction separately.

Goyal and Chaudhary have been arrested on charges of conspiring to kill Agarwal and pushing him off Lohagad Fort. Goyal reportedly told police she did not want to marry Agarwal and plotted with Chaudhary to kill him to avoid social disgrace. Investigators are examining various aspects, including planning, movements, digital footprints, and motives behind the murder, officials added. —*PTI*

Siya Goyal and Chetan Chaudhary were arrested for allegedly conspiring to kill Ketan Agarwal and killing him at the Lohagad Fort in Pune—*PTI*

Centre proposes changes in medical devices' rules

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

The Union health ministry has proposed amendments to the Medical Devices Rules, 2017, to reduce approval timelines for manufacturing licences across risk categories, aiming to boost regulatory efficiency and ease of doing business.

The draft notification, published in the official gazette, seeks to simplify the licensing process while maintaining quality. .

Medical devices are classified into four risk-based categories, Class A, B, C and D, with Class D comprising the highest-risk devices. Under the proposed changes, the timeline for Class B low to moderate-risk products like BP monitors, hypodermic needles and pulse oximeters, would be cut from 140 to 115 days. For Class C and D devices, covering high-risk products the timeline would be reduced from 105 to 90 days. — *PTI*

CRACKDOWN AT CHANDNI CHOWK

Delhi man barred from selling Tag Heuer

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

A Delhi court has restrained a shop owner near the New Lajpat Rai Market in Chandni Chowk here from using, selling, soliciting and displaying imitation products of Swiss luxury watchmaker Tag Heuer.

District Judge Anubhav Jain was hearing the plea of the plaintiff, Switzerland-based M/s Tag Heuer SA, according to which it had learnt that some people, including the shop owner, are using trademarks identical or similar to it."The said trademarks and labels adopted and being used by the defendant are fraudulent and are imitations of the plaintiff's registered trademarks, and the defendant fraudulently started using the impugned marks, being influenced by and inspired by the plaintiff's marks," the plea said.The defendants are violating the plaintiff's rights in the said marks and labels, it said.

"The defendant is not only making the retail sales but is also supplying the impugned trademarks to various other dealers/shopkeepers/retailers in Delhi who are making the clandestine sales thereof to unwary consumers," the plea said.

In an order dated 9 June, the court said after the filing of the present suit in January 2016, the court had appointed a commissioner who inspected the defendant's shop bearing No. 17B, Pleasure Garden Market, New Lajpat Rai Market, Near Gauri Mandir, Chandni Chowk. "The commissioner recovered 235 pieces of watches, mentioning Tag Heuer and 15 empty boxes of Tag Heuer," the court said. — *PTI*

POLLUTION

UNDER LENS AS BIRTH DEFECT CASES RISE

Environmental pollution, hormone-disrupting chemicals and maternal health factors during pregnancy are increasingly coming under scientific scrutiny as researchers seek to better understand hypospadias, one of the most common congenital conditions affecting male newborns.

Hypospadias occurs when the urethral opening develops on the underside of the penis instead of at the tip during fetal growth.

Though the condition is generally treatable through surgery, experts say identifying possible environmental contributors has emerged as an important public health concern.

Globally, hypospadias affects roughly one in every 150-200 male births. Based on India's annual birth rate, specialists estimate that close to one lakh boys may be born with the condition every year.

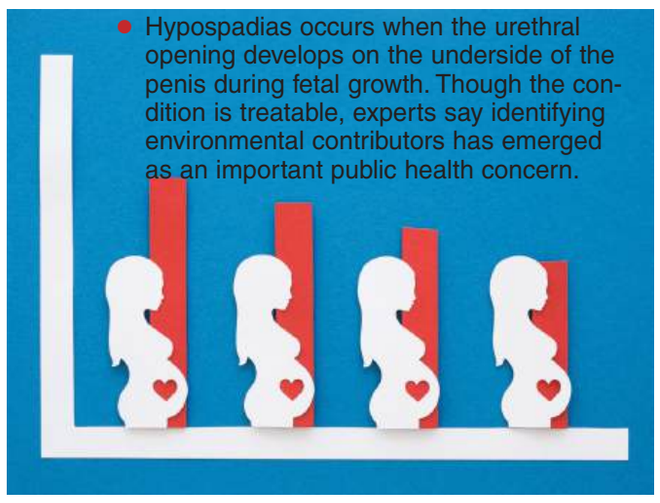
"Hypospadias is usually easy to diagnose because the urethral opening is not located at the tip of the penis," said Dr Shandip Kumar Sinha, director of pediatric surgery and pediatric urology at Medanta-The Medicity, Gurugram.

"The foreskin may be underdeveloped and the penis may show a downward curvature in many cases," he said.

Early diagnosis helps ensure timely treatment, which generally involves reconstructive surgery aimed at straightening the penis and repositioning the urethral opening to the tip.

"The success rate of surgery is usually high, particularly when performed at an early age," Dr Sinha said, adding that most procedures are carried out between nine months and two years of age, although complex cases may require staged operations.

Dr Prabudh Goel, professor of paediatric surgery (PhD in genomics of hypospadias) at AIIMS, Delhi said that every day in India, roughly 800 boys are born with this condition. Affecting one in every 125 live male births, it is among the most common birth defects globally, and its incidence is quietly but steadily rising, Dr Goel told PTI.


Hypospadias occurs when the urethral opening develops on the underside of the penis during fetal growth. Though the condition is treatable, experts say identifying environmental contributors has emerged as an important public health concern.

Most cases are treatable through surgery, but the growing numbers are prompting doctors to ask an uncomfortable question, is the world we have built making our children sick before they are even born?

Doctors identify three broad causes of hypospadias. The first is genetics, where inherited gene variants disrupt normal genital development.

The second is inadequate exposure to male hormones (androgens) during a critical period between the eighth and sixteenth weeks of pregnancy, when the baby's genitalia are forming.

The third, and increasingly concerning, is exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) in the environment.

"Our bodies are regulated by hormones, and EDCs can mimic or block these chemical messengers," said Dr Goel. "They are found in everyday sources such as plastics used to heat food, pesticide residues, industrial pollutants and contaminated water and heavy traffic corridors," he said.

According to him, these chemicals can cross the placenta and reach the developing fetus, where they not only interfere with hormones but also alter epigenetics - the process that determines how genes function.

"Think of DNA as the text of a book, and epigenetics as the notes telling the body which chapters to read," Dr Goel said. "EDCs can switch off genes crucial for normal hormonal development, and some of these changes may even be passed on to future generations," he explained.

Beyond hypospadias, prenatal exposure to EDCs has been linked to undescended testes, reduced sperm quality and a higher risk of testicular cancer in adulthood - conditions collectively known as testicular dysgenesis syndrome, he stated.

Emerging research also suggests possible links to hormonal imbalances and developmental disorders.

Dr Goel said prenatal EDC exposure may also affect girls, with studies linking it to early puberty, menstrual disorders, polycystic ovarian syndrome, reduced fertility and possibly endometriosis and hormone-sensitive cancers.

The societal implications are hard to ignore, Dr Goel said. Rising hypospadias rates are, in a sense, a biological signal or a warning that our food systems, urban air quality, industrial regulation, and plastic dependency deserve far greater scrutiny than they currently receive.

Prevention is imperfect but not impossible. Expectant mothers are advised to avoid heating food in plastic containers, choose organic produce where feasible, stay away from pesticide-heavy environments, and seek early and regular prenatal care.

Policy changes such as stricter regulation of EDCs in consumer products and better industrial waste management are equally necessary, Dr Goel stressed.

Sudies published in Environmental Health Perspectives and Human Reproduction Update have reported associations between prenatal exposure to some EDCs and male reproductive abnormalities, including hypospadias, although direct causation has not been established.

Dr Sinha said hormonal exposure during pregnancy may influence risk in some cases.

"Maternal exposure to progesterone during pregnancy may increase the risk of hypospadias in a male fetus," he said, noting that the condition can also run in families. "If a biological relative such as the father or a brother has had hypospadias, the chances may be slightly higher," he said.

Some scientists consider hypospadias part of a broader spectrum of male reproductive disorders known as Testicular Dysgenesis Syndrome, which also includes undescended testes and impaired reproductive function later in life.

Dr Raman Kumar, chairman of the Academy of Family Physicians of India, said congenital disorders linked to environmental exposure required greater public health attention and long-term monitoring.

"Family physicians are increasingly seeing concerns around pollution, lifestyle factors and reproductive health. Strengthening awareness about environmental risks and integrating preventive counselling into primary healthcare can help families make informed choices during pregnancy," he said.

Despite concerns over environmental exposures, doctors emphasise that outcomes for children with hypospadias are generally excellent when the condition is diagnosed and treated early. "Healthcare providers usually identify the condition soon after birth during routine examination by a pediatrician," Dr Sinha said. "Early evaluation allows proper surgical planning and helps ensure the best outcomes." —*PTI*

SALAR

After the twin quakes, Venezuela's biggest challenge is recovery

For a country already facing serious humanitarian needs, the two powerful earthquakes that shook Venezuela on 24 June, have made life even harder.

Millions of Venezuelans were already struggling to get enough food, medicine, fuel and basic services to survive before this disaster. Now, even more people there urgently need shelter, medical care, clean water, food and support.

I, a scholar of humanitarian assistance with more than 10 years of experience managing humanitarian aid in Latin America, am teaching a course on disaster field operations.

The graduate students taking this class were already learning how recovery from earthquakes and other disasters in Latin America depends on having strong local partners, reliable supplies and support that reaches the people most affected.

Now, with these earthquakes, they will get to see how this kind of tragedy unfolds in real time.

A woman cries next to damaged buildings days after an earthquake struck La Guaira, Venezuela – *PTI*

Indian Air Force C-17 Globemaster III aircraft arrives at Maiquet a International Airport, Caracas, carrying 66 tonnes of humanitarian aid – *PTI*

CAN VENEZUELANS LIVING ABROAD REACH LOVED ONES?

With more than 50,000 people unaccounted for, the number of causalities may soar from initial reports of hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.

And the number of people who have become displaced following the destruction of their homes is likely to remain unknown for weeks.

For the estimated 8 million Venezuelans living outside their native country, including the 1.2 million Venezuelans and people of Venezuelan descent who reside in the US, this is their worst nightmare. Many are unable to reach their loved ones, and every hour without contact brings more fear, confusion and pain.

For Venezuelans abroad, grief is turning into action. Community groups, nonprofit organizations and Venezuelan-owned businesses are collecting donations and raising funds to support disaster recovery. Their efforts show the deep connection Venezuelans still have with their homeland.

HAVE OTHER NATIONS BEGUN TO HELP?

The international community has risen to the occasion, showing support by sending equipment, such as helicopters, planes and logistical machinery, that rescue teams can use to rescue trapped people and conduct other disaster response operations.

The list of countries pledging to send humanitarian aid includes the United States, Brazil, El Salvador, Mexico, Spain, Germany, France and many others.

But because of the serious damage to airports, hospitals and other essential infrastructure, getting that aid delivered quickly could prove difficult.

Videos made by people on the scene and news reports show that Simón Bolívar International Airport, the country's busiest, is in trouble, with ceiling panels falling, debris scattered throughout the terminal and power outages – leaving it unable to operate.

If the airport stays closed for a long period of time, it will interfere with deliveries of aid from foreign governments and international organizations, such as the International Red Cross and UN World Food Programme.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO HELP VENEZUELA NOW?

As images of the destruction spread on social media and the news, many people are asking how they can help.

My answer is simple: Donate money to trusted organizations that were already working in Venezuela before the earthquakes.

Giving cash to those nonprofits will make it possible for local groups and global organizations operating in Venezuela to respond quickly and effectively. They can purchase food, water, medicine, hygiene supplies and other essential items near the affected communities, saving valuable time and avoiding many of the delays that come with shipping supplies from another country.

Providing cash also helps strengthen the local economy when goods are purchased from nearby businesses, while sending blankets, food and other goods doesn't do that and create hassles for aid workers. This keeps money in affected communities, helps local vendors stay open, protects jobs and supports recovery while families receive help faster.

The Associated Press is maintaining a list of vetted organizations responding to the crisis in Venezuela.

ARE THERE PRECEDENTS FOR WHAT'S HAPPENING IN VENEZUELA?

The aftermath of Venezuela's earthquakes reminds me of the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010. Both were complex disasters made worse by already fragile infrastructure.

In Haiti, I saw many nonprofits and international agencies arrive; some of their staff who were dispatched to help had little or no experience in the country. This personnel problem contributed to a long recovery time.

My hope for Venezuela is that the coming flood of aid supports its recovery from its prior problems rather than complicates that process in a nation that continues to face one tragedy after another. —*PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Tuned out of news & tuned into crisis, India's FM radio seeks reforms

FM radio in India is under threat, industry leaders warn, as regulatory constraints combine with the relentless rise of digital audio to shrink revenues, close stations and risk losing the medium's unique local reach.

Last month HT Media surrendered several FM licences in important markets, taking five stations off air on 15 June. The decision underlined a growing alarm among broadcasters that an array of policy bottlenecks is undermining an industry already squeezed by streaming services, podcasts and changing listener habits.

"Global shift towards on demand audio is undeniable," said Nisha Narayanan, director and COO of Red FM. "But the real question is whether the FM industry is being given a fair regulatory environment to compete, innovate and monetise effectively while making the transition."

The industry has four central demands. Broadcasters want private FM stations allowed to air news and current affairs — a privilege currently reserved for All India Radio (AIR). They want the goods and services tax on radio services cut from 18 per cent to 5 per cent. They urge the government to require smartphone makers to unlock FM receivers that are present but often disabled in devices. And they ask for licence fees to be pegged to a fixed percentage of actual earnings, rather than being linked to historical auction prices that they say are punitive.

For millions of Indians, FM radio is still a daily companion. It reaches commuters, households, cars and small towns where streaming is patchy; it works without data and can be relied on during power cuts or network outages. "There are over 40 crore daily listeners across AIR, private FM and community radio in India," Narayanan noted. "Radio provides last mile access that no streaming platform can match."

Yet the economics tell a stark story. The Association of Radio Operators for India (AROI) says radio is the only segment of the country's media and entertainment industry that is contracting. While the wider sector grew 9 per cent to Rs 2.78 lakh crore in 2025, radio revenues fell 7 per cent to roughly Rs 2,300 crore. Private FM revenues in 2025 were estimated at about Rs 1,819 crore, still below 2020 levels despite more stations being operational. Radio's share of ad spending has dipped from more than 3.4 per cent in 2015 to roughly 1.1 per cent in 2025.

Industry leaders point to a combination of factors behind the slump. Pandemic related

For millions of Indians, FM radio is still a daily companion. It reaches commuters, households, cars and small towns where streaming is patchy; it works without data and can be relied on during power cuts –*AI*

disruption and a slow recovery hit revenues hard; at Red FM, government advertising volumes have fallen by more than 30 per cent and associated revenues by 27 per cent compared with pre Covid levels. Broadcasters also blame policy shortcomings. "The FM radio industry expanded aggressively, betting on a local advertising boom that grew slower than expected," said Radio City CEO Abe Thomas. "Simultaneously, policy bottlenecks, news restrictions, fragmented implementation, delayed reforms, constrained monetisation far more than comparable markets globally."

A major grievance is the ban on independent news broadcasts. Executives say news programming drives habitual listening, deepens community engagement and opens new revenue categories. Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and the Philippines have blended music, news, talk and sports on commercial radio successfully, keeping the medium relevant even as streaming grows. "The news ban has been one of FM's most costly missed opportunities," Thomas said.

Broadcasters also attack the licensing regime. They argue that licence extension fees tied to historical auction prices place a disproportionate weight on operators and discourage long term investment. The current batch of licences must be renewed by 2030; without clarity on the renewal framework, pricing or TRAI recommendations, firms say they cannot confidently invest in people, technology or content.

Smartphone FM chips are another unresolved issue. Many devices carry FM receivers that are software disabled. Activating them, industry representatives say, would not require new hardware but a simple software unlock, a small policy nudge that could restore large swathes of free, over the air listening that do not depend on mobile data.

Taxation is the fourth battleground. Broadcasters contend that an 18 per cent GST rate puts radio at a competitive disadvantage compared with other media segments taxed at 5 per cent; they estimate nearly 40 per cent of gross revenue is eaten up by GST, licence fees and spectrum charges. The sector paid about Rs 999 crore to the government in FY26, the industry says.

The government, however, frames the problem partly as an inevitable technological shift. Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw told PTI the sector is in the midst of a broader transformation akin to the decline of landlines or the shift to electric vehicles. "Every such technological change brings changes in the industry structure," he said, while adding that the government is examining the FM industry's requests and deliberating on the news issue.

A draft of the Telecommunications (Television, Radio and Associated Services) Rules, 2026, published for public feedback on 12 June, keeps the existing restriction on news broadcasting by private FM stations — a sign reforms are not yet settled.

Even so, broadcasters say FM still offers unique public value, especially in emergencies. "FM remains the most resilient medium during disasters and network outages," Thomas said. Yet they warn that without timely policy changes the medium could shrink further and become more urban centred and less representative of India's diverse voices.

Some executives are candid about the need to evolve. "The term 'radio company' itself is becoming obsolete," Thomas observed. "Consumers don't distinguish between FM, podcasts, streaming or social audio; they simply consume content." The future, he and others argue, lies in integrated models that combine broadcast reach with digital audio, live events and regional storytelling.

But they warn that transformation will be far harder to achieve if regulatory barriers are not eased in the next two to three years, when they say weaker operators could be forced out and many local stations go dark. —*PTI*

— PTI

Pakistan raises petroleum levy, fuel rates remain

ISLAMABAD, 28 JUNE

Pakistan's government increased the petroleum levy on petrol and high-speed diesel (HSD), yet kept retail prices steady for another week despite falling global oil prices, reports The Express Tribune. The petroleum levy on HSD has risen by PKR 6.57 per litre to PKR 79.54, while petrol's levy increased by 39 paisa to PKR 66.64. Kerosene oil's levy remains unchanged at PKR 20.36. The government decided not to pass global price drops to consumers, maintaining existing petrol and diesel prices. However, kerosene price was reduced by PKR 6.85, now at PKR 227.05 per litre, down from PKR 233.90. Additionally, the government cut aviation jet fuel prices by PKR 7.15 per litre, bringing it to PKR 231.72. —*ANI*

Pak suspends Geo News for content on Muharram

ISLAMABAD, 28 JUNE

Pakistan's media regulator has suspended Geo News' broadcast licence for 15 days over content aired during a Muharram programme that it said could offend religious sentiments, undermine harmony and disturb public order. The regulator said the channel broadcast "religious visualisations" without exercising editorial caution. Geo News apologised, saying the material was aired in error, removed it from all platforms, and said it depicted rituals practised by some communities in Iraq and the Middle East without endorsing any religious view. Authorities ordered an internal inquiry and referred the matter to the regulator's Council of Complaints. Pakistan continues to face criticism over press freedom, ranking 153rd of 180 countries in 2026.—*AGENCIES*

Argentina Prez's aide resigns amid corruption scandal

BUENOS AIRES, 28 JUNE

Manuel Adorni, Argentine President Javier Milei's Cabinet chief and close aide, resigned following a corruption scandal that has shaken the libertarian government, reports AP. Adorni, once Milei's spokesperson and the face of austerity and anti-corruption efforts, faces investigation for illicit enrichment linked to lavish spending and property purchases. He denies wrongdoing. In his resignation letter, Adorni said, "For the first time since 2023, I am going against your wishes". Milei defended his aide, stating "Manuel is innocent" and "I stand by my ministers to the bitter end." Adorni's private life came under scrutiny after photos of luxury vacations and property acquisitions emerged, contrasting his salary of around $2,600 monthly.—*PTI*

11 skydivers killed as plane crashes in France

BELGRADE, 27 JUNE

All 11 people on board were killed after a skydiving aircraft crashed shortly after take-off in northeastern France on Sunday, authorities said. The plane, belonging to a local skydiving club, suffered a malfunction and "fell almost vertically" after departing from the Nancy-Essey airfield on the outskirts of Nancy, Meurthe-et-Moselle prefect Yves Séguy said. It crashed near the airfield on the edge of a built-up area. Séguy said, "Had it occurred just a few dozen metres away, the accident could have caused collateral casualties." The aircraft was carrying participants for a parachute jump. Emergency services rushed to the scene and provided psychological support to victims' relatives. Authorities have launched an investigation to determine the cause of the crash.—*PTI*

Iran controls Hormuz for 30 days: Araghchi

Says Tehran will decide Strait's future

BAGHDAD, 28 JUNE

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Iraqi counterpart Fouad Hussein after a meeting at the Foreign Ministry in Baghdad, Sunday —*PTI*

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Sunday said that only Tehran is in charge of reopening the Strait of Hormuz under the Tehran-Washington Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), warning that any foreign interference will complicate the process, according to state media.

"The Strait of Hormuz remains under the total oversight and management of Iran through the 30 coming days, and after all obstacles are removed, the total capacity of the waterway will be restored. This is what we are working on," said at a press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein, in Baghdad, amid renewed tensions with the US. Araghchi claimed this was "totally clear" in the MoU.

"These arrangements are being implemented, and the responsibility for them lies with Iran… Any interference in this matter and any attempt to adopt new or separate arrangements will only lead to more complicated situations and delays in the reopening of the, and will fuel tensions," he added.

Under the MoU signed earlier this month, the US and Iran have 60 days to iron out the details, but both sides have repeatedly contradicted each other on the interpretation of the text, with key issues still unresolved. The Strait, however, is a critical maritime chokepoint. Around a fifth of the world's oil passed through it before the war began in February, and its closure has sent energy prices spiralling since.

Pakistan, meanwhile, is now considering importing "cheaper" oil and gas from Iran following the easing of sanctions by the US, said Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik.

Meanwhile, Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei called for criminal cases against the US and Israel and restoring those rights violated by "international criminals and arrogant and aggressive powers," in a message carried by state media.

Mojtaba has not been seen in public since the US and Israel assassinated his father, former supreme leader and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Mojtaba said that the two "wars of aggression" – a reference to the 12-day war last June and the current war – form the basis for "thousands of significant legal cases".

Citing the attacks on the Minab school bombing that killed 160 people, he said that the investigation has been "entrusted to the competent authorities". —*Salar News*

There is no room for two states: Netanyahu

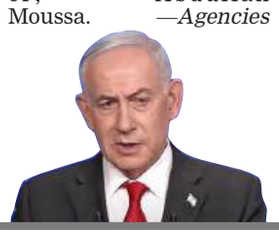
TEL AVIV, 28 JUNE

Israeli Prime Minister firmly dismissed the possibility of a two-state solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In a statement on Saturday, he said that the Israel public had been divided on the issue three years ago before the 7 October attack by Hamas and the subsequent war. But that has now changed and there is "significant basis for agreement", he said. "Between the sea and the Jordan River, there is no room for two states."

His comments come ahead of the Israeli elections, which are slated to take place on 27 October.

Meanwhile, an Israeli drone strike killed two Palestinian siblings, including a teenage girl, in southern Gaza and wounded at least seven others. The strike targeted tents sheltering displaced Palestinians in the Muwasi camp, killing 15-year-old Islam Moussa and her 30-year-old brother, Abdullah Moussa. —*Agencies*



In an AI image, US President Donald Trump likened himself to Atlas - the Greek god who holds the earth - Lebanese President Joseph Aoun —*x*

Trump affirms Lebanon's sovereignty in call with President

BEIRUT, 28 JUNE

US President Donald Trump dialled his Lebanese counterpart Joseph Auon on Saturday to discuss the recently signed Lebanon-Israel peace framework. Trump indicated a possible meeting with Aoun in Washington.

During the call, Trump reaffirmed his country's support for Lebanon and the Lebanese people and pledged to work toward implementing the provisions of the agreement to restore security and stability in Lebanon. Trump also reaffirmed his administration's support for Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Aoun voiced his hope that the US would take an active role in preventing any breaches of the accord.

The Israel-Lebanon agreement has already showed signs of falling apart, with Hezbollah not being a party to the Washington-brokered deal. Hezbollah has already declared that the deal was "null and void" and vowed to continue its "armed resistance" until the IDF withdraws.

Israel, meanwhile, has continued to maintain a "security zone" in southern Lebanon. It also carried out strikes on Sunday, continuing to burn homes and drop cluster munitions, Lebanon's National News Agency reported.

Meanwhile Israel's National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir dubbed the agreement a "historic mistake" on X, and said that the Lebanese Army would not be able to deal with Hezbollah. —*Agencies*

A 90-minute gunfight echoed across Karachi when TTP militants laid siege to a paramilitary Rangers' headquarters on Saturday —*ANI*

6 terrorists, 4 Pak soldiers killed in Karachi Rangers HQ

KARACHI, 28 JUNE

Pakistani security forces killed six terrorists and captured one alive after a militant assault on a Sindh Rangers compound in Karachi on Saturday night, leaving four of the paramilitary personnel dead in the city's first major terrorist strike since October 2024.

Attackers belonging to Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a banned faction of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), stormed the Sindh Rangers' Bhittai Wing headquarters in the densely populated Gulistan-e-Jauhar area around 8.30 pm, ramming a vehicle through the main gate before hurling hand grenades and triggering multiple explosions.

The 90-minute gun battle ended after Special Security Unit commandos and the Anti-Terrorist Force joined Rangers personnel in neutralising six militants. One injured attacker was captured alive.

Authorities sealed off the compound and surrounding roads as the operation unfolded.

Nearby residents were told to stay indoors, and some neighbourhoods experienced power outages.

The assault is the first terrorist attack in Karachi since October 2024, when two Chinese engineers were killed in a suicide bombing near Karachi airport claimed by the banned Balochistan Liberation Army.

The last major TTP attack in Karachi occurred in February 2023, when militants stormed the Karachi Police Office on Shahrah-e-Faisal.

The attack comes amid heightened Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions, with Islamabad repeatedly accusing Kabul of providing sanctuary to TTP militants, and striking Afghan territory. —*PTI*

Venezuela quake toll hits 1,430; 68,900 still missing

LA GUAIRA, 28 JUNE

Tensions flared Saturday as desperation grew in Venezuela's state of La Guaira as rescuers and civilians searched for earthquake survivors and the death toll rose sharply to 1,430.

Venezuela's government said families reported at least 68,900 people missing, three days after the one-two punch of 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes devastated the South American nation.

The International Organisation for Migration said over 6 million people could be affected, some 2 million in the capital, Caracas, alone.

The disaster poses a huge challenge for Delcy Rodríguez, the former vice president who took office in January after the US capture and removal of then-President Nicolás Maduro.

Many Venezuelans viewed the government response as inadequate by the government, whose soldiers, firefighters, police and military cadets were evidently underprepared to respond to the scope of the tragedy.

Many in disaster zones said they had seen little of their government.

Venezuelans looking for loved ones and neighbours used shovels, heavy equipment, ropes and bare hands atop mounds of toppled concrete throughout La Guaira, one of the hardest-hit states.

They were joined by a growing number of international rescue teams from Mexico, the US, Brazil, El Salvador, France and elsewhere.

Experts said the destruction was amplified by the quick succession of shallow aftershocks that followed. —*PTI*

Men search for survivors atop a mountain of rubble after twin earthquakes struck Venezuela, in La Guaira, on Saturday —*PTI*

6.1 MAGNITUDE EARTHQUAKE RATTLES JAPAN

TOKYO, 28 JUNE

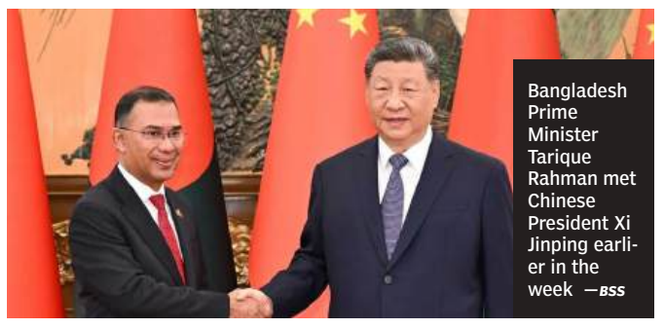
A magnitude-6.1 earthquake rattled northeastern Japan early on Sunday, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency. No tsunami warning was issued and there were no immediate reports of damage or casualties. But the recent spate of quakes coming during typhoon season has set off worries about mudslides. Sunday's quake struck off the coast of Iwate Prefecture at 7:25 a.m. local time, with a depth of about 40km. The agency has warned more may follow. —*PTI*

Japan to seek clarity on Bangladesh-China pact

DHAKA, 28 JUNE

Japan may seek clarification regarding a clause that seems to be directed at it in the Bangladesh-China joint statement that was issued during Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's visit to China, where he also met President Xi Jinping.

The clause in question uses the phrase "fascistic and militaristic revival", a term that China has been frequently deploying to describe Japan after Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi took power, particularly because Beijing has been disappointed by her comments about defending Taiwan, a Japanese diplomatic source said.



Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman met Chinese President Xi Jinping earlier in the week —*BSS*

"Both sides agreed that it is essential to firmly uphold the outcomes of the victory of World War II and oppose any attempts for fascistic and militaristic revival," the communique said.

Notably, Tarique also affirmed the 'One-China' principle during his meeting with Xi, which states that Taiwan is a part of China.

Meanwhile, 11 Chinese companies are looking to invest USD 9.21 billion in Bangladesh, said a government official.

Among this, state-run China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation plans to invest USD 650 million in the Mongla Port Economic Zone. —*ANI*

RECORD TEMPERATURES IN EUROPE

1,000 killed in France amid heatwave

BERLIN, 28 JUNE

France saw around 1,000 additional deaths last week at the height of its record-smashing heat wave, the country's public health agency said Sunday, as Europeans elsewhere were suffering through yet another day of new temperature highs.

There were more than 1,200 deaths on Wednesday, when France was sweltering under its hottest temperatures ever, increasing to more than 1,400 deaths on each of the two following days, Public Health France said. 85 per cent of the deaths involved people aged 65 and above.

The agency cautioned the estimate could rise. Denmark's Meteorological Institute reported a record 37 degrees Celsius in Odum — the warmest day since records there began in 1874.

France said that the toll was likely to rise as it is grappling with its hottest heatwave on record —*x*

In Switzerland, a record 38.8 C was set in the city of Basel.

In Germany, new temperature highs of 29.4C at night in eastern Saxony, and 41.5 C in the day in Saxony-Anhalt were recorded.

The Czech Republic also saw its hottest day on record, with 40.8 C in the town of Doksany. Slovakia confirmed that Friday night was its warmest on record, with temperatures not dropping below 26.3C.

Friday was also confirmed as the UK's hottest June day on record, with a provisional temperature of 37.3 C recorded in eastern England.

Italy's health ministry issued a red alert for the heatwave in 18 Italian cities including Milan, and Rome for Saturday and Sunday, with temperatures expected to climb to 39C in some areas. —*PTI*

Four killed in flooding in Kentucky after heavy rains

FRANKFORT, 28 JUNE

Severe flooding caused by thunderstorms has resulted in four deaths in Kentucky, according to Governor Andy Beshear. He issued a state of emergency as more rainfall is expected. Flash flood warnings remain in effect for parts of Kentucky and Indiana, with the National Weather Service reporting between 4 and 10 inches of rain already fallen in southwestern Indiana, and further rain forecast for Kentucky.

Beshear's office confirmed three fatalities in Madison County and one in Jackson County. He stated, "This is a serious flooding event, where teams have already had to conduct multiple water rescues from vehicles and homes across the commonwealth." He urged residents to stay alert and avoid driving, especially after dark due to limited visibility. In northwestern Kentucky, near Louisville, Bullitt County emergency authorities urged residents on a rural road to evacuate following a landslide at a dam embankment. The dam remains stable with no imminent failure, but the area has received about 3 inches of rain over the past two days. —*PTI*

Authorites warned of flash flooding —*SCREENGRAB*

Progcap plans to raise up to $45M in FY28

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

MSME fintech firm Progcap aims to raise up to USD 45 million in FY28 through share sales to expand its lending business. Co-founder Himanshu Chandra said, "We are planning a capital raise through equity dilution next financial year," likely via private placement depending on the valuation. The quantum could be in the range of USD 40-45 million, with the dilution expected to be in the single digits. Since obtaining an NBFC licence in 2022, Progcap has experienced rapid growth in MSME lending, especially to wholesalers and retailers. Present in 500 cities across Tier II, III and IV towns, it has over 30,000 borrowers with an average ticket size of Rs 10 lakh—*PTI*

Cooling products see mixed response in June

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Demand for summer products was uneven during the June quarter, with air-conditioner sales declining amid unseasonal weather and inflation, while beverages and ice cream remained resilient. Industry experts said AC sales slowed in June, especially in north India, due to thunderstorms and lower evening temperatures reducing cooling needs. Consumers are postponing discretionary purchases and switching to fans and coolers as AC prices increased by 18-20 per cent over recent years. Kamal Nandi from Godrej stated, "Refrigerator is doing very well, and demand is high both for mass and premium segments. Washing machine demand is also picking up as we are entering the monsoon season." Coca-Cola reported strong summer demand, driven by immediate consumption and small packs.—*PTI*

As GST turns 10, focus shifts to AI-led compliance

Centre uses tech to reduce compliance costs, speed up refunds

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

The government is increasingly using technology to simplify compliance, particularly for MSMEs –*AI*

As India enters the tenth year of rollout of the Goods and Services Tax, the focus is shifting from implementation to efficiency through use of artificial intelligence, data sharing and process simplification to reduce compliance costs, speed up refunds and tighten enforcement.

The government is increasingly using technology to simplify compliance, particularly for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), while integrating GST, income tax and customs databases to improve risk assessment, curb tax evasion, and reduce manual intervention.

Introduced on 1 July 2017, GST replaced a complex system of 17 central and state taxes and 13 cesses with a unified indirect tax framework. The registered taxpayer base has expanded from 66.5 lakh at launch to about 1.6 crore in 2026, reflecting increased formalisation of the economy.

GST was introduced as a four-tier structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28 per cent. A cess was levied over and above the 28 per cent rate for luxury, sin and demerit goods. As the GST system matured over the years, with stability in revenues and technology backend, besides increasing the registered taxpayer base, policymakers decided it was time for a rate rationalisation.

Starting 22 September 2025, a next-gen GST with a two-tier structure was launched by placing most goods and services into two slabs: 5 per cent for essential items and 18 per cent for standard goods and services. A separate 40 per cent slab was kept only for luxury and demerit goods. Following the rate cut, prices of most items went down, resulting in savings for people.

GST rates in India are determined by the GST Council, which includes representatives from the Union and State or Union Territory governments.

When GST was launched in 2017-18, the average revenue collected per month was Rs 89,700 crore. The average monthly collection stood at Rs 1.85 lakh crore in FY26, up from Rs 1.84 lakh crore in FY25. The gross GST revenue increased 8.3 per cent year-on-year to Rs 22.27 lakh crore in the 2025-26 fiscal. In 2024-25, it grew 9.4 per cent to Rs 22.08 lakh crore. This rise reflects the growing formalisation of the economy and improved tax compliance.

Over the past 9 years, the growth in GST mop-up has shrugged off the concerns of states which feared revenue loss after they gave up their rights to levy state taxes like VAT and central sales tax, entertainment tax and octroi. —*PTI*

MINERALS TO MICROCHIPS

Private sector key to India-US AI push: Official

WASHINGTON, 28 JUNE

The private sector will play an indispensable role in transforming India-US cooperation in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, quantum technologies and critical minerals into real-world outcomes, a senior Indian official said at a roundtable on "Securing the Foundations of AI Together: US–India Cooperation from Minerals to Microchips."

The roundtable was organised earlier this week by the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum (USISPF) in association with the Embassy of India and Silverado Policy Accelerator.

"India and the United States have built a comprehensive strategic partnership fit for the 21st century. Through initiatives spanning AI, quantum technologies, critical minerals, advanced energy, and trusted supply chains, we are now moving from principles to projects," said Additional Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs K Nagaraj Naidu at the event.

"India is positioning itself as a trusted and resilient partner in the global technology supply chain. Our electronics manufacturing ecosystem has expanded dramatically, semiconductor fabrication is now becoming a reality, and the next phase of our Semiconductor Mission will build on this momentum," said S. Krishnan, Secretary, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

"Together, we can build trusted, resilient technology ecosystems while ensuring secure access to the critical infrastructure that powers these emerging technologies," said India's Ambassador to the US Vinay Kwatra.

USISPF President and CEO Mukesh Aghi said microchips and critical minerals had become the "elixir" of the modern economy and would shape global technological leadership in the 21st century. —*PTI*

AI, geopolitics to prolong IT sector slowdown: JP

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

The India IT sector is facing an uncertain demand environment from an unprecedented confluence of technology and business cycle headwinds from GenAI-led deflation and geopolitics, JPMorgan said in a research report.

The brokerage said the IT services industry "has been stuck at 2-3 per cent revenue growth over the last three years" and it sees "further headwinds to growth over the next two years." In light of uncertainty around the timing of a positive inflection, JPMorgan has moderated its medium- to long-term growth estimates and now does "not expect large-caps to hit mid-single-digit growth and hover around 3-4% revenue growth." Here's a more concise version:

The report said fears over rapid AI changes and geopolitical uncertainty are delaying deal signings and ramp-ups, clouding IT spending recovery and likely extending weakness into Q2 FY27.

JPMorgan said the sector remains in the first phase of AI adoptionwhere productivity gains from AI in legacy operations are yet to offset weak demand. It now expects the recovery to stretch beyond FY29 into FY30, with growth likely to remain "L-shaped." —*ANI*

LED BY ICICI

Mcap of 6 of 10 valued firms climb ₹88,678 cr

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

–AI-GENERATED IMAGE

The combined market valuation of 6 of the top-10 most valued companies went up by Rs 88,678.1 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with ICICI Bank emerging as the biggest winner.

Last week, the BSE benchmark Sensex climbed 297.57 points, or 0.38 per cent, and the NSE Nifty went up by 42.9 points, or 0.17 per cent.

The market valuation of ICICI Bank jumped Rs 29,588.75 crore to reach Rs 9,95,610.74 crore, the most among the top-10 firms.

HDFC Bank added Rs 24,718.3 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 12,25,981.44 crore. The valuation of Reliance Industries surged Rs 12,043.96 crore to Rs 17,83,926.92 crore and that of Bajaj Finance climbed Rs 11,580.28 crore to Rs 6,10,081.53 crore. The market capitalisation (mcap) of State Bank of India rallied Rs 9,322.93 crore to Rs 9,64,738 crore, and that of Larsen & Toubro edged higher by Rs 1,423.88 crore to Rs 5,80,550.83 crore.

However, the mcap of Bharti Airtel tumbled Rs 35,615.21 crore to Rs 11,27,348.09 crore.

The valuation of LIC eroded by Rs 21,188.74 crore to Rs 5,35,537.56 crore, and that of TCS declined by Rs 11,143.71 crore to Rs 7,58,206.42 crore.

Hindustan Unilever mcap dipped by Rs 5,321.83 crore to Rs 5,10,624.92 crore. —*PTI*

- The combined market valuation of 6 of the top-10 most valued companies went up by Rs 88,678.1 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with ICICI Bank emerging as the biggest winner.

EMPLOYERS BACK MBA DEGREES DESPITE AI BOOM

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Employers worldwide continue to trust MBA degrees amid fears that AI may make business graduates redundant, according to a GMAC report.

Based on an annual survey of 621 recruiters from 39 countries, over half of respondents agreed that a business degree is more vital even as companies adopt new technologies.

The survey shows 99 per cent of employers in 2025 had confidence in graduate management education (GME), rising to complete confidence in 2026. Employers value GME graduates for their ability to navigate complex environments, with nearly three-quarters citing this as the most important reason for confidence.

The report highlights the importance of communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence in the AI era, while noting declining perceptions of professionalism across sectors, except among technology employers.

The report notes the need to prepare graduates. —*PTI*

'India's debt mkt not equipped to finance next phase of growth'

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

India's debt market is not equipped to finance the country's next phase of economic growth and requires structural reforms to improve liquidity, price discovery and participation, according to Deloitte's "State of Financial Services in India" report.

The report said India's economy needs significantly higher levels of long-term capital, but the existing debt market cannot efficiently meet those needs. "To realise the ambition of becoming a USD 7.3 trillion economy by 2030, the debt market must bridge this gap efficiently. Today, it is not equipped to do so," it said.

The report recommended three reforms: deepening the debt market by broadening investor participation and integrating money, bond and derivatives markets; making interest rates genuinely market-driven, supported by a robust benchmark yield curve; and making domestic currency markets more attractive to global investors so that rupee price discovery shifts onshore.

Deloitte added that stronger debt markets, alongside greater AI adoption and higher foreign capital inflows, represent key priorities for India's financial services sector. —*ANI*

540+ trees chopped for Chhattisgarh iron ore

KANKER, 28 JUNE

Over 540 trees were cut to build a dirt road for transporting iron ore from the Rowghat mine in Kanker district, Chhattisgarh, without forest department approval, officials said. The charge was denied by Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP), part of SAIL, which confirmed trees had been felled but insisted the construction was had forest clearance.

BSP stated the road was built in March-April. Forest officials inspected the site near Sargipali village on 18 June, registering a Preliminary Offence Report (POR). An inquiry found the road was built without statutory permission, with initial estimates indicating nearly 540 trees had been felled.

The 1.34km long, 10-metre wide road was constructed to facilitate truck movement. BSP's Arun Kumar said the project complied with 2009 forest clearance for 883 hectares. BJP MP Bhojraj Nag called the matter serious and promised to seek action. —*PTI*

Rajasthan, Gujarat, Arunachal face highest climate risk

NEW DELHI, 28 JUNE

Rajasthan, Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh carry the highest climate-related financial risk in India's renewable energy portfolio, according to Zurich's analysis of assets through 2030.

Rajasthan, India's largest renewable energy state, has 272 assessed sites spanning 82,149 MW of planned capacity, with 85 per cent of assets in critical risk categories and a Value at Risk of USD 16.4 billion. Temperatures regularly exceeding 50°C stress both solar panels and supporting infrastructure.

Gujarat has 172 sites across 47,530 MW, with 90 per cent of assets in critical categories and a VaR of USD 8.6 billion.

Arunachal Pradesh presents the most striking profile: just 30 sites carry a VaR of USD 13.1 billion, with 96 per cent of assets in the highest risk categories.

Its portfolio is almost entirely hydropower, concentrated in eastern Himalayan foothills where precipitation, slope instability, seismic activity and flood risk compound one another.

Among other states, Karnataka has the lowest risk rate at 5 per cent, while Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh have 94 per cent and 78 per cent of assets respectively in the highest categories. —*ANI*

INDIA-LANKA FERRY TERMINAL TO GET DUTY-FREE SHOPS

CHENNAI, 28 JUNE

The international passenger terminal at Nagapattinam Port, serving the India-Sri Lanka ferry route, is set for a major upgrade. The Tamil Nadu government has decided to establish duty-free retail shops for the first time at the port, aligning it with global maritime hubs.

The terminal, developed by Tamil Nadu Maritime Board (TNMB), facilitates ferry services between Nagapattinam and Kankesanthurai near Jaffna, launched in August 2024. The route has become vital for tourists, pilgrims, business travellers, and the Indian and Sri Lankan diaspora, carrying over 25,000 passengers.

The introduction of duty-free outlets will enable eligible travellers to purchase goods exempt from certain customs duties, with operations outsourced to a private entity. The shops are expected to be fully operational within six months. —*ANI*

Fusion CX to invest ₹100 cr in Bengal's silicon valley

KOLKATA, 28 JUNE

Fusion CX will invest Rs 100 crore over the next three years to establish an IT and ITeS campus at the Bengal Silicon Valley Tech Hub in New Town near Kolkata.

The company has secured 1.06 acres in Action Area II for an 11-storeyed, two-lakh-square-foot facility expected to create more than 9,000 jobs at full capacity.

"West Bengal offers a lot of potential. We are hopeful that the new government will make the investment climate conducive. We will invest around Rs 100 crore over the next three years in this facility. The campus has the potential to generate employment for more than 9,000 people at full capacity," co-founder, managing director and CEO Pankaj Dhanuka told.

He said West Bengal remained the company's largest offshore delivery cluster, citing its talent pool, improving infrastructure and strategic location, while expecting around nearly 35 per cent annual growth to continue, supported by AI-driven service augmentation. SEBI has approved its proposed Rs 1,000 crore IPO. —*PTI*

JUST ROLLED OUT IN US

Google Wallet adds package tracking via Gmail

WASHINGTON, 28 JUNE

–AI-GENERATED IMAGE

Google has introduced a new package-tracking feature in Google Wallet that automatically detects shipping information from users' Gmail inboxes and displays parcel updates directly in the app.

According to GSM Arena, the tech giant is testing the feature in the US.

The feature works by scanning Gmail for digital receipts and tracking numbers, then using that information to provide package tracking inside the Google Wallet interface.

Packages that are due to arrive soon appear on the Wallet home screen alongside users' payment methods, offering quick access to delivery updates.

As per GSM Arena, users can also open the package entry to view more detailed tracking information. Once a package has been delivered, it can be dismissed manually, while the system is also expected to remove delivered packages automatically over time.

The integration is not entirely new in concept. Google has previously experimented with package tracking through its now-retired Google Now service.

There are, however, a few limitations. The feature is currently available only in the United States.

Google says it supports most major retailers and their email formats, although compatibility is not expected to extend to every smaller retailer or online store.

To use the feature, users must also enable "Google Workspace smart features" in Gmail settings. Without this setting turned on, package tracking in Google Wallet will not function.

The new addition expands Google Wallet's utility beyond payments by integrating parcel tracking into the app, offering users a more centralised way to monitor upcoming deliveries. —*PTI*

MESSI is 1st to score in 7 straight WC games

Extends goals record; Argentina beats Jordan

ARLINGTON, 28 JUNE

Lionel Messi didn't have much time to try to become the first to score in seven consecutive World Cup games.

Argentina's superstar did it anyway as a second-half substitute.

Messi made it seven straight while extending the all-time men's World Cup scoring record with his 19th goal in Argentina's 3-1 victory over Jordan in a group stage finale on Saturday night.

In his first match since turning 39 three days earlier, Messi scored on a free kick after being taken down just outside the penalty box in the 80th minute. The low kick barely above the grass surface split two Jordan defenders into the left corner of the net.

It was his 72nd career goal on a free kick, including his 12th for Argentina. Messi now has 123 international goals — second all-time to Cristiano Ronaldo's 145 — in 202 appearances.

Giovani Lo Celso became the first Argentina player other than Lionel Messi to score in this World Cup as the defending champions finished the group stage with a three-game sweep after a 3-1 victory over Jordan.

Lo Celso, in his first World Cup start, put Argentina ahead to stay when he scored on a direct free kick in the 19th minute. Messi added one of his own after entering the game in the second half, and the top scorer in World Cup history extended his mark to 19 goals.

"I am very happy for him, for the moment he is having," Lo Celso said in translated remarks about their captain.

Messi had been one of only three players to score in six consecutive World Cup games along with France striker Just Fontaine and Brazil great Jairzinho.

Messi also scored on a free kick against Nigeria in the 2014 World Cup and is among six players since records are available dating to 1966 who scored two free kick goals in the World Cup. He joined Pelé, Rivellino, Téofilo Cubillas, Bernard Genghini and David Beckham.

Argentina is the 3RD team after Brazil and Germany to win 50 World Cup matches

An eight-time winner of the Ballon d'Or as the best player in Europe, Messi has never won the golden boot as the top scorer in each World Cup. This is his sixth.

The knockout round for Argentina begins Friday in South Florida, and in this expanded 48-team tournament that would be the first of five matches in 17 days if La Albiceleste makes it to the final on 19 July. —*PTI*

Austria's Konrad Laimer and Algeria's Ramy Bensebaini compete for the ball during Group J soccer match —*PTI*

Algeria & Austria break Iran's heart

KANSAS CITY, 28 JUNE

Algeria and Austria produced one of the most dramatic matches of the group stage, battling to a pulsating 3-3 draw in their final Group J fixture that secured qualification for both teams while ending Iran's hopes of reaching the Round of 32.

With both sides aware that a draw would be enough to progress, the contest began cautiously in Kansas City. Neither goalkeeper was seriously tested during the opening 20 minutes.

The game sprang to life immediately after the first hydration break. Austria captain David Alaba showcased his trademark vision with a superb long pass that split the Algerian defence, allowing Marko Arnautovic to race through and calmly slot past Oussama Benbot to hand Ralf Rangnick's side the lead.

Algeria responded with intent. Rafik Belghali fired narrowly wide before Farès Chaibi struck the post from distance.

Their persistence paid off just before halftime when Belghali produced a moment of individual brilliance, gliding past two defenders inside the box before smashing an unstoppable effort into the roof of the net to restore parity.

With the score locked at 2-2, both teams appeared content with the result as the clock ticked towards full-time.

However, stoppage time delivered extraordinary drama. Mahrez struck again in the 93rd minute with a low finish that seemingly secured all three points for Algeria and threatened Austria's qualification.

But with virtually the last kick of the game, substitute Sasa Kalajdzic rose highest to power home a dramatic equaliser, sparking wild celebrations among the Austrian players and supporters. —*ANI*

Congo is 8th African team in round of 32

ATLANTA, 28 JUNE

Africa had a historic 10 nations qualify for the 2026 World Cup. And now, following Congo's 3-1 defeat of Uzbekistan on Saturday night, eight are officially headed to the knockout stage.

The previous record was two.

After 17 days of competition, Morocco, South Africa, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Cape Verde, Egypt and Congo qualified for the round of 32. Algeria can advance with a win or a draw against Austria on Saturday night.

Morocco was the first African nation to reach the semifinals of the World Cup four years ago in Qatar and looks capable of going deep again, having already held Brazil to a 1-1 draw. It is a co-host for the next edition of the World Cup in 2030.

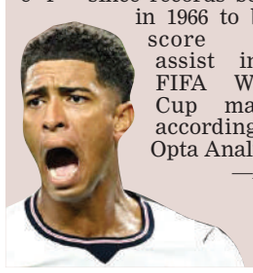
Only six African countries had ever qualified for the knockout stage (several of them multiple times). The most in the same year had been two, in 2014 and '22.

This year's tournament has shown the strength of African soccer goes deep, with Cape Verde and Congo both surprise names in the round of 32. Congo has a tall task in facing England next, but for now, the team is soaking in the moment.

Forward Fiston Mayele scored a goal 78 minutes in, sandwiched between two scores from Yoane Wissa — a penalty kick at the 68-minute mark and another in stoppage time. —*PTI*

Bellingham is youngest England player to score

Jude Bellingham underlined his growing influence for England with a goal and an assist as the Three Lions sealed top spot in Group L. The 22-year-old midfielder continued his fine run in national colours, having now scored in two of his last three appearances for England, as many goals as he had managed across his previous 18 international caps. His all-round display also saw him create Harry Kane's goal, making him the youngest England player since records began in 1966 to both score and assist in a FIFA World Cup match, according to Opta Analyst. —*ANI*



BOTH INTO KNOCKOUTS

Colombia wins Group K after draw with Portugal

MIAMI GARDENS, 28 JUNE

Colombia secured top spot in Group K after a goalless draw with Portugal at Hard Rock Stadium, with both teams already qualified for the knockout stage. Colombia's plan was nearly perfect, with the only missing element a goal. Despite the scoreless result, Colombia finished as group winners, with 24 of 37 attempts on goal, displaying outstanding football in temperatures exceeding 30°C.

Colombia coach Néstor Lorenzo said, "We were the better team and deserved to win. I think we created so many chances. We just lacked finishing. The players were outstanding against a top contender ... not only did we play them on equal terms, we dictated the terms." Colombia will face Ghana on 3 July, while Portugal, the second-place team, will meet Croatia on 2 July.

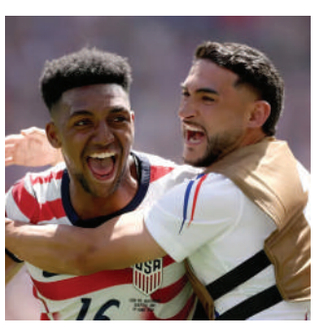
Portugal's coach Roberto Martínez stated, "Win, lose or draw, it didn't make a difference. Our goal is to play eight matches. We tried to win the match." Portugal's Diogo Costa made six saves, and Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice in the group stage.

The match attracted a sellout crowd of 64,478, including notable figures like FIFA President Gianni Infantino, ex-player Carlos Valderrama, and celebrities such as Matt Damon and Jimmy Butler. The fixture was highly anticipated, with ticket prices reaching around $3,500. —*PTI*

Ronaldo equals 2nd-highest WC appearances

Cristiano Ronaldo matched another FIFA World Cup milestone despite Portugal being held to a goalless draw by Colombia in their final Group K fixture. The 41-year-old Portugal captain made his 25th FIFA World Cup appearance, drawing level with Germany great Lothar Matthaus for the second-most appearances. Only Argentina captain Lionel Messi, with 29, has featured in more World Cup matches. Ronaldo also has now been flagged offside 11 times across the last two World Cups, four more than any other player in that span. France's Kylian Mbappe and Colombia's Luis Diaz are next with seven. —*ANI*

Vlašic scores winner as Croatia beats Ghana 2-1



PHILADELPHIA, 28 JUNE

Luka Modric created World Cup history as Croatia beat Ghana 2-1 on Saturday to reach the knockout stage, with the 40-year-old becoming the oldest player to record an assist in the tournament.

Modric's corner in the 83rd minute was headed home by Nikola Vlašic for the winner after Derrick Luckassen had cancelled out Petar Sucic's stunning 31st-minute strike. Croatia finished second behind England in Group L, while Ghana, already assured of qualification before kickoff, ended third.

Modric, aged 40 years and 291 days, set the assist record in statistics dating back to 1966. The 2018 Ballon d'Or winner also played his 200th international match.

"I told him after the game, you play like you're 20 years old," Sucic said. "He is our leader and our best player."

"Luka was unbelievable today," Vlašic added. "It seems like he turned time back 10 years."

Ghana goalkeeper Benjamin Asare produced a fine save moments before Vlašic's decisive header. Coach Carlos Queiroz blamed "two easy goals" for the defeat, saying Croatia deserved the victory. —*PTI*

ENGLAND BEATS PANAMA 2-0

EAST RUTHERFORD, 28 JUNE

Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane scored early in the second half, lifting England over Panama 2-0 Saturday and into what appears to be a more favorable bracket for the knockout phase.

Panama held the European power scoreless through a first half when neither mounted threats and Kane had 10 touches, the fewest of any player.

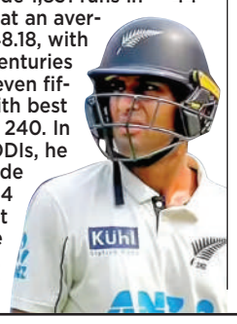
Harry Kane is England's all-time World Cup goaling leader with 11th score

Bellingham put the Three Lions ahead in the 62nd minute from Bukayo Saka's corner kick. Held in bear hug by Jorge Gutiérrez, Bellingham stuck out his left leg and stabbed the ball past goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera for his third WC goal, his second this year. England finished the group with two wins and a draw for seven points. —*PTI*

Rachin Ravindra completes 4,000 runs in int'l cricket

NOTTINGHAM, 28 JUNE

New Zealand batter Rachin Ravindra completed 4,000 runs in international cricket. Ravindra achieved the milestone during his side's third and final Test against England at Nottingham on Saturday. Ending the day three with a lead of 204 runs at 120/3, Ravindra was unbeaten at 60 in 90 balls, with eight fours. In 115 appearances for NZ across formats, Rachin has 4,014 runs at an average of 36.82, with 10 centuries and 17 fifties in 125 innings, with best score of 240. In 24 Tests, he has made 1,831 runs in 44 innings at an average of 48.18, with five centuries and seven fifties, with best score of 240. In 39 ODIs, he has made 1,424 runs at average of41.88. —*ANI*



Srikanth enters US Open final

FULLERTON, 28 JUNE

Star Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth edged out Japan's Yudai Okimoto in a three-game thriller to progress to the men's singles final of the US Open Super 300 badminton championships here.

Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medallist, recorded a 22-20, 15-21, 21-19 win over World No. 33 Okimoto in 72 minutes to enter his first final of the season.

Srikanth, a former world No. 1, will meet World No 46 Su Li Yang of Chinese Taipei in the summit clash.

Young shuttler Rounak Chouhan's dream run at his maiden Super 300 tournament ended with a 17-21 19-21 loss to Su Li Yang in the other men's singles semifinal.

In the women's singles, sixth seed Devika Sihag, who won the Thailand Masters earlier this year, fell to Denmark's second seed Line Christophersen 21-15, 11-21, 15-21 in a 54-minute semifinals.

Srikanth vs Okimoto

Srikanth, now ranked 38th, raced to a 9-5 lead before extending it to 17-10. But Okimoto staged a remarkable comeback, winning 10 of the next 12 points to earn a game point. The 33-year-old Indian snapped out of his slumber just in time, reeling off the next three points to pocket the opening game.

In the decider, Srikanth rediscovered his mojo, opening up a 10-5 lead. But that advantage soon evaporated as Okimoto moved 13-12 ahead. The Indian then won six straight points to surge to 18-13. The Japanese once again fought back to level the scores at 18-18, but Srikanth held his nerve to prevail in the end. —*PTI*

- Kidambi Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medallist, recorded a 22-20, 15-21, 21-19 win over World No. 33 Okimoto in 72 minutes to enter his first final of the season

England cricket captain Ben Stokes retires

NOTTINGHAM, 28 JUNE

England captain Ben Stokes made the dramatic decision Sunday to announce his imminent retirement from international cricket midway through the deciding third test against New Zealand.

"This is my last two days as your captain and my last two days representing England," Stokes told his England teammates inside the dressing room at the start of play at Trent Bridge on Day 4, in a video released on social media by England Cricket.

The match is headed to a fifth and final day Monday.

The announcement came 15 minutes before the tea break. Stokes picked up a wicket moments later and was given a standing ovation.

"The reasons can wait (about) why," Stokes said.

Stokes, one of the world's most well-known cricketers, has represented England for 15 years, the peak surely coming in 2019 when he starred for England in its wild win over New Zealand in the 50-over World Cup final at Lord's.

Stokes has decided to quit international cricket during a series when he made front-page news after being dropped by England for the second test amid an investigation following a night out with teammate Gus Atkinson after the first test at Lord's.

The two players were in a London nightclub when an England team security official was reportedly struck by a rugby player from English club Saracens. Stokes was recalled for the third test. —*PTI*